University of Alberta

Wonder and the Agencies of Retreat

by

Philo H Hove

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Secondary Education

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Philo H Hove

Philo H Hove
#2, 3516 – 15th Street SW
Calgary AB
Canada T2T 4A3

December 18, 1998

University of Alberta

Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Wonder and the Agencies of Retreat" submitted by Philo Hove in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Dr. Max van Manen

Dr. Terrance R. Carson

Dr. David G. Smith

Dr. Janis Blakey

Dr. Robert Burch

Dr. David Jardine

November 6, 1998

For Dianne

with love and gratitude

ABSTRACT

Among the expressions of postmodernity in Western culture is an increasing engagement in meditation retreats. This dissertation examines the experiential dimensions of wonder in view of the intense environment of Buddhist "mindfulness" (*sati*) practice. They are linked by virtue of wonder's resonance with the "insight" (*vipassanā*) such practice is understood to elicit which, in turn, invites an investigation of the pedagogy of retreat.

Wonder is identified by Plato to be philosophy's true beginning and by Martin Heidegger as its sustaining passion, wherein one confronts the unexpected strangeness of what is most ordinary – the fact that something *is* as it is. The mindfulness meditation retreat involves a social leave-taking in which qualities of silence and a disciplined attentiveness are fostered; Buddhist theory understands this practice to lead to definitive insights regarding the nature and diverse agencies – the ontological character – of experience.

This work introduces both wonder and mindfulness retreats through phenomenological narrative, before a more hermeneutically informed inquiry of each is undertaken. Meditation achieves an interrogation of habit that opens one to the lived-moment. In wonder our customary assumptions endure a marked rupture or crisis: neither one's concepts of "self" nor "other" are indifferent to its thrall, such that an ethically charged *interest* can be awakened and one's very identity put into question. Similarly, meditative insights reveal an agency beyond the horizons of will, wherein the lived-moment attains its own (extra)ordinary character. Mindfulness meditation may be regarded a method for promoting wonder; insight, as wonder's culmination.

Teaching in the meditative environment is congenial to wonder/insight insofar as it encourages inner silence, attentiveness, and a deepening *consent* towards experience-as-lived. In this way the meditation instructor practises an "anagogical" regard – i.e., teaching which accompanies (*agogy*) the practitioner back or anew (*ana-*) to the honest textures of what is present. My exploration of personal experience and interview material reveals such anagogy to be imbued with kindness and humility, and to be attuned to the enduring virtues of companionship along a *curriculum vitae* fully engaged in the myriad, unavoidable expressions of life to which our continual becoming makes us heir.

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1

THE PHOTOGRAPH: *A Beginning*

> *It is so difficult to find the beginning. Or better: it is difficult to begin at the beginning. And not to try to go further back.*[1]
>
> – Ludwig Wittgenstein

There are times when recollections return with the vigour and freshness with which we associate their "original" state, as if the myriad dimensions of an experience were suddenly alive again in that form which until now had been forgotten. This happened recently while listening to some jazz: the lyrical geometry of a double-bass solo by Charlie Haden. The solo acts as a prelude. With the other instruments standing silent, Haden begins to move unhurriedly forward: soft double-stops, loving, gentle scales rising and falling upon the ebony finger board; sombre, gracious and deep, deep voices reverberating from within the generous spaces of the instrument's great body.... And then, for the first time I detect the magic – an oblique foreshadowing of what is soon to be the piano's opening figure – a splendid moment, but prefiguring something else, altogether unexpected: a vivid memory (who can say why *this* memory? why *now*?) from my high school years.

I recall sitting at home on a school day waiting for lunch, idly flipping through the newest copy of *Time* magazine, when my attention was caught by a photo. If memory serves, the accompanying article was about a violinist (it might have been Ruggiero Ricci) who had recently obtained permission to record the last of Nicolò Paganini's violin concertos. Under instruction from Paganini's will, the work had remained hidden in a vault until that year. Aside from this news, though, was for me the more intriguing information about the nineteenth century virtuoso himself: his technical audacity (extemporising along the length of a single string, left-handed *pizzicato*), his libidinous habits, the contemporary rumours of dark crimes and demonic aid. Something of the romance and prowess of Paganini enraptured me, I suppose, and often, while rereading the article, my eyes returned to that remarkable photograph of the master: chiseled face, long black hair, serpentine fingers – standing in taut readiness to strike an opening chord.

Seen in the context of the plethora of images which assail us there is little doubt that this photograph was memorable, if only for its evident age. Recently finding a reproduction of it again,[2] the long-remembered pose of the violinist, standing with bow raised, is confirmed anew. I see the great hands (*larger* than I remember), medals displayed on his chest (which I had forgotten); his boots had been polished. A slender figure: he is, though, somewhat less sinewy than I recall. Again, Paganini's face intrigues me: long, hawkish nose, prominent chin – it is a strange face: seen against the shaded background, the black hair and clothing, its whiteness makes it appear mask-like. Although I can make little of his eyes, which look down to the violin, his expression seems rather impassive; in fact, calling to mind the few biographic sketches of Paganini I have read, little appears in his face which can be said to *reveal* the vigour of his artistry or passion.... No doubt it is the modest lie of such early photographs, where the subject was suspended from the many currents of daily life by the requirement to "stand" for the camera, there to be "caught" for all time.[3]

These are my most immediate impressions of this study, presumably taken not long after the advent of photography itself. Paganini died in 1840 and a print of the first photograph – a ghostly, still-life arrangement taken "around 1823" by Niepce – can be found in Roland Barthes' *Camera Lucida*.[4] Among other things Barthes' phenomenological inquiry into the "Photograph" yields an impressive array of *surprises* and so is germane to my present question. If the photograph of Paganini no longer calls up the romantic images which once stirred my attention I must admit, still, to a fascination – perhaps a surprise – of some kind. For Barthes a photograph may surprise us owing to the rarity or freakishness of the image it reveals; because it has caught a fleeting or "decisive" gesture seldom noticed, or, due to technical "prowess," an event the naked eye could never see (a fired bullet, its movement impossibly *frozen* as it punctures an apple); deliberate distortions may be produced by tricks of perspective; our attention may be arrested by some happenstance or "lucky find."[5]

None of these quite capture the sense I have in this case; however, a distinction which Barthes establishes does bring clarity to this question. He writes of an image's *studium*, which connotes a field of interest, the fact that a photograph expresses a range of influences and signs which render it recognisable, locatable. For instance, the photograph of Paganini shows a musician who participated in an age of different manners – the "pose," the display of medals. In contrast to aspects of an image which are *apparent* in this way, Barthes speaks of an "unexpected flash"[6] which occasionally disturbs this field

of interest, a break from the *studium* wherein an "element which rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces,"[7] one which "stings," "pricks," and even "bruises" the observer.[8] He names this the *punctum*.

A favourite poster in my office shows an expanse of calm sea divided near its lower edge by the line of a single wave. I like it for its quiet rhythm, and for the way the wind has collected some spray near the wave's powerful centre, where it has just started to roll and break. Also caught by the sunlight, this shock of white spray offers the only interruption in the photograph's pale evenness. Even such a simple image can get one thinking, and once or twice I have placed myself on an imagined shore with this scene before me, listening to the surf and seabirds; feeling breeze and sun. I enjoy all these things about the poster but it wasn't until after I bought it that I noticed something else: a lone freighter whose bulk "lurks," nearly dissolved in the dense mist, at the very top. This discovery (how could I have missed it?) was a happy surprise that I now often refer to as a "bonus" when pointing the poster out to a visitor. Unlike the wave, which is "caught" by the wind and light somewhere in the midst of its eternal movement, the freighter *waits*. It is a slightly incongruous thing, at once motionless and unsettling: like a quiet stranger whose motives are unknown. Barthes would probably say that the presence of this vessel acts as a *punctum*, for I never quite get used to it.

I return to the photograph of the violinist. Where might its *punctum* reside, for me? Here is Paganini, who died leaving behind him, among other scores, the twenty-four daunting *Caprices*; a man who dazzled his contemporaries – imagine bearing for a lifetime the memory of having heard *this* man play the violin, authorising you to say: "Yes, the performance had its merits, but it does not compare to that evening I heard *Paganini*." Indeed, it is difficult to exaggerate the impact Paganini had on some of his listeners – in 1829 one Paris critic implored his readers to

> Sell all you possess; pawn everything, but go to hear him! Woe to him who lets the opportunity go by! Let the women bring their new-born babes so that sixty years hence they can boast of having heard him! ... This thing is the most astounding, the most surprising, the most marvellous, the most miraculous, ... the most unexpected that one can imagine! ... In a dream Tartini saw a devil playing a diabolic sonata – that devil was surely Paganini![9]

Apparently, I experience a vague nostalgia while looking on it. Although silent and still here, this is a man once fully engaged in the sweeping movements of his time and whose work continues to find expression in our own. Not that there has ever been unanimity about him,[10] whether in reference to his art (*mere* technique?) or to the man himself (his

notoriety).... But these observations, too, identify its general interest, not its *punctum*. What is it that unsettles me, slightly, when I look at this old image? Perhaps it is this: issuing from the distant, unchanging figure is the irrefutable evidence that he *once lived*. The photograph's *punctum* is strikingly ontological – with more certitude than the legends and even the music this photograph demonstrates to me Nicolò Paganini's *existence*. Owing to this revelation, no doubt, it was understandably gratifying to find the picture again while gathering these impressions of the artist. Imagine my shock upon learning that it is a photograph of someone *else*.

It is true: this image which had once so captured my imagination and returned to my attention only recently, stimulating these reflections, was *contrived*. Please note that I have not withheld this throughout for the sake of its ironic effect; in truth, I discovered the fact while actively composing these ideas, well after being implicated by my memories. But the fact remains: the figure holding the violin in the photograph is someone who occupied another time, those remarkable hands and face are the features of *another man*. A biographer of Paganini, Geraldine de Courcy, has identified both the Bologna instrument-maker who perpetrated this fraud in the late 1890s and the Venetian photographer with whom he colluded; she has traced its copyright and sale in Germany and its eventual publication in England.[11] Does my knowledge of this deception efface the photograph's interest, now? (Another surprise:) No.

In part this is surely due to its real presence, however ill-deserved, within the experiences I've recounted. But for a bit of investigation, inspired above all by a simple desire to look at the photograph again, I could easily have lived my life untroubled by any questions of its authenticity.[12] Although I no longer can give a name to the odd, still face which looks down on the violin (a secret, even after de Courcy's research), its appeal is undiminished by this recently acquired anonymity. It *persists* troublingly within all of my recollections of "Paganini" – and not merely as evidence of the traces it has left – somehow the face of this man still *catches* me. Yet, curiously, while its *studium* has if anything grown to evoke other fields of possibility I find that its *punctum* remains the same, for, emerging from out of the photograph itself is the continuing fact of its *age*. This requires qualification: while its rarity or age makes it different from the thousands of other photographs I am exposed to, this is not quite the point that reaches out and probes me. Rather, its *punctum* is an extension or deepening of "age" – that is, insofar as the photograph somehow reveals *temporality*.[13]

There is both a paradox and a coincidence here. Whatever else the image may suggest after these revelations it is no less the face of a living man who is now certainly dead. This point can be sharpened by a painful simultaneity. Looking upon a photograph of a condemned man waiting to be hanged, Barthes decisively remarks: *"He is dead, and he is going to die...."*[14] Beyond the question of identity the photograph demonstrates the simultaneous "defeat"[15] and revelation of time. This wonderful insight must be credited to Barthes, who concludes his study by observing that a photograph which disturbs or "wounds" in this way does so because it provokes us "to confront in it the wakening of intractable reality."[16] Is this, finally, what I find so striking: a poignant demonstration of time's passage and, by extension, my own?

It might well be the case, were it not that another type of *punctum* remains to be disclosed. Strictly speaking this recollection, this *punctum,* was what originally disturbed me while listening to the bass solo. It is easily as unsettling as the one related and returns us to the time shortly after my having first seen the photograph in the pages of a magazine.

After school a few days later I visited my good friend, Arthur. Spotting one another earlier in the day we had made plans to listen to music at his house. We had plenty of common interests, including art – although I did not share his marvellous talent for it, which by that time was well known at our school. (In a conversation I often recalled with envy and awe, our art teacher had confided to me that Arthur was something a teacher could expect only once in his career, if lucky: "a genius.") As I walked through the back door after a perfunctory knock he called from his room: "Downstairs!" So down I ambled: my first visit in almost a week.

It is no trouble to recall the great fondness I had for going there. The generous room he shared with his older brother (a tremendous musical talent, an aspiring luthier: it was a gifted family) betrayed such variegated, Bohemian interests – "Bohemian" had seemed a very suitable word for the room's many distractions, when I was seventeen. Walking in, only a casual glance was needed to confirm its familiar feel.

While Arthur searched for something he wanted me to hear I looked over a group of paintings and sketches randomly stuck on the wall opposite the record player and, beside them, to a sculpture he was still working on. There were dried bits of clay underfoot. As the music started and my friend fiddled to get a record back into its sleeve I slumped into the only uncluttered spot, an old upholstered chair. My attention focused a

bit on the song and then began to wander around the walls again... and *that* is when I saw it – the pen-and-ink drawing off to my left. "Hey, what's *this*?" I quickly approached it for a closer look:

Standing in it was a weird, wiry figure of a man. He had stringy hair, angular, bird-of-prey features and, most curiously, sprouting from his head – a pair of devilish horns. *The man was holding a violin.*

For that brilliant moment I could not take my eyes from it. When they began, all of my questions to Arthur were charged by a sudden intensity: he seldom read *Time* and, no, he hadn't heard of Paganini. "... okay, but *when* did you draw it?" As he paused I thought back to the day I had been reading at home. His response confirmed my expectation: he'd drawn the violinist during the lunch break at the precise time that I had been staring at the disturbing image in the magazine. (What made me so certain of a connection between these events?) The next day I brought the *Time* article over to compare his composition with the photograph. Each of the expressive details was mirrored, from the dramatically poised bow to the shaded texture in the background of the violinists. They differed only in the preternatural horns, although these had been very much alive in my reveries about the demonic violinist, and as I reflected upon the event I became persuaded with some enthusiasm of the astonishing extent and permeability of life....

Somewhere, here, there looms a double *aporia*: that the world is comprised entirely of familiarity and strangeness, and that everything is independent of and implicated by everything else. However surprising or confounding this might be, it is sometimes enduringly evident.

Naturally enough my friend and I attempted to "explain" the uncanny *timing* of his drawing, and the fact that the two violinists were so *alike*, but perhaps because they are endlessly contestable these attempts now seem to obscure rather than reveal. Beyond and (critically) *before* any question of its "origin," the event of happening upon this drawing caught me unawares, disturbing without warning the flow of ordinary moments which had until then been comprising another day.

Yes, the stunning, paradoxical truth that resides in the photograph – the simultaneous passing and cessation of time – lingers in me still; but what continues to pull me back to this constellation of memories is the sudden discovery of the photograph's "double." I was surprised, delighted, bewildered, and for a few moments – and at the heart of it all – in wonder. Can you see it yet?

No doubt there is much that is questionable in the angles and folds of this narrative; no doubt a good deal of the difficulty of this beginning issues from the fact that the real locus of my interest eludes the normal grasp of my reflection and words. At least my approach achieves a measure of caution, now. For one thing, although a fascination with the photograph of the violinist continues, its soundly refuted identity elicits a prudence towards ideas held with conviction. More tellingly, I see that the composite and curious nature of my memories of this event have tended to draw me *away* from what I am most concerned to find: a species of *punctum*, that momentous instant when I happened to be *struck*.[17] To raise this distinction again, the *studium's* interest resides *in* an image, an experience; it is given to it, found and located in it – whether by history, culture, an artist or observer; its interest and familiarity are present and recoverable. But the *punctum* is an inversion of the apparent and familiar. I do not find it; somehow in its sharpness and startling reach it finds me.

Accordingly, further care is needed. Because they are comparative, reflective, and – however brief the interval – *after the fact*, even the "timing" and "alikeness" of the photograph and drawing do not disclose the real *evidence* of the experience; not quite. One might say they are (literally) "beside the point." Yet, forever inclined to movement, thought requires care, in this instance, merely to *settle*. Something remains; before the resumption of the familiar there was just this – an irreducible co-incidence: the fact that *that* drawing appeared *then*.

My friend kindly gave me his pen-and-ink drawing and I often brought it out to ponder during the next few months. But in the awkward, uncertain movements of early adulthood it was left behind, or forgotten... forgotten for many years, until, stirring so unexpectedly in the thrall of a double-bass solo was the recollection of a deep surprise, which briefly resounded in me again. Whatever it all may mean the event has drawn me with undeniable gravity to consider something I seek to understand: an experience which flashes, disturbs, perplexes, and arrests; one which awakens or fades forgotten in the lives of us all – one which I name once more: *wonder*. Though time and endless occupations may intervene, can one ever wholly recover from this kind of thing? (Would this be a good thing?)

If the pace of my inquiry is (deliberately) slow it is because it is precisely the haste of our lives which passes over, subdues, forecloses the transparent *punctum* of wonder. We desire speed out of habit but beneath this, it seems, is an anxiety or disquiet with the texture of common things; our quest for novelty may preclude an attentiveness to things

and very often is spurred by the disquiet we have with standing, sitting and watching. We desire to keep moving, maintain our momentum, but in doing so lose sight of the *moment* which comprises our living. But when we stop, linger, observe and consider, a new quality emerges in these moments, an interest and surprising urgency to things as they are, and as they change. The photograph of Paganini, as "contrived" as it was, told me something about the inevitability and "intractability" of my condition. As much as anything, my current pace is meant to offer or provoke that genus of pause, or stillness, which is natural to wonder. Not out of a naive or nostalgic view of the present but because the condition of any of us is nourished on occasion by the light wonder brings.

NOTES

[1] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, ed. G.E. Anscombe and G.H. von Wright (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 62e.

[2] Leslie Sheppard, and Herbert R. Axelrod, *Paganini* (Neptune City, NJ: Paganiniana Publications, Inc., 1979), 330.

[3] With a luminous gift for reminiscence, Isak Dinesen (Karen Blixen) evokes this milieu delightfully: "It was presumably something of a trial to be 'taken' by a photographer in the days of the daguerreotype. The client had to sit in a fixed position with a rod running up his back for a full half-minute, without blinking. And it was probably seldom a really pleasant surprise for people who had grown up knowing the portrait painter's interpretation of them, to see themselves in photographic reproduction. Princess Caroline, Prince Ferdinand's spouse, had had her portrait painted many times in her life – but when she was given the first daguerreotype of herself she looked at it silently for a long time and then said, 'Well, I am ver-ry thankful that my friends have stood by me.' But the daguerreotype could reply to complaints with a righteous insistence on its veracity: it said, 'That's the way you look!'" – Isak Dinesen, *Daguerreotypes: and Other Essays* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 17.

[4] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 86.

[5] Ibid., 32-33.

[6] Ibid., 94.

[7] Ibid., 26.

[8] Ibid., 27.

[9] G. I. C. De Courcy, *Paganini the Genoese*, 2 vols. (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1957), 1: 361.

[10] Opinions did vary. For instance, there is an aloofness present in Goethe's impressions. Seeking to "arrive at an intelligent estimate of all these wonders," he notes that "[f]or this pillar of flame and cloud, I lacked a base for what one calls enjoyment, which with me always hovers somewhere between the sensuous and the intellectual. I have only heard something meteoric and then couldn't account for it" (ibid.). The comments of Louis Spohr are more critical; while admiring elements of Paganini's skill, he concludes: "In my own case the total impression, especially after frequent hearings, was by no means satisfying and I've no desire to hear him again" (ibid., 392). Yet even among musicians no accord can be found, as is borne out by the young Liszt, left reeling with inspiration after hearing Paganini in recital: "For a fortnight now my brain and fingers have been working like two damned creatures: the Bible, Plato... Beethoven, Bach, Hummel, Mozart, Weber are all round me. I study them, meditate on them, devour them ravenously – and in addition I practice exercises for four or five hours.... Ah, if I only don't go mad, you'll find an artist in me! What a man! What a violin! What an artist!" (ibid., 2: 17-18).

[11] After all this it is ironic, now, to think that Paganini very nearly *did* become photographed. De Courcy shows that one A. de Vigne wrote to the maestro asking to capture his likeness with a "daguerrotype apparatus" early in 1840, but Paganini, who died a few months later, was in no condition to allow it. (Ibid., 2: 309 n. 1)

[12] In any case, how do we account for the unpredictable power, and caprice, of memory? Gaston Bachelard observes: "And thus it is that I have chosen phenomenology in hopes of reex-

amining in a new light the faithfully beloved images which are so solidly fixed in my memory that I no longer know whether I am remembering or imagining them when I come across them in my reveries" – *The Poetics of Reverie: Childhood, Language, and the Cosmos*, trans. D. Russell. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969), 2.

[13] That is, not just "its time," but "Time."

[14] Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 95.

[15] Ibid., 96.

[16] Ibid., 119.

[17] In using Barthes' term in this manner I am conscious of extending its application beyond an instance of being caught by a photographic image. I suggest that his description of the *punctum* permits us to consider it in relation to anything striking or unsettling (etc.) which arises in a moment of experience.

2

(POST)MODERN CONDITIONS

> *What makes a philosopher is the movement which leads back without ceasing from knowledge to ignorance, from ignorance to knowledge, and a kind of rest in this movement.*[1]
>
> – Maurice Merleau-Ponty

In order to offer a backdrop for understanding the phenomenon of the meditation retreat and its pedagogic sphere, in the following I wish briefly to track some elements of modern life. In Chapter Three I will provide an introductory sense of what kind of world meditators enter and at a later juncture in this study, through the medium of interviews, will advert to the concrete circumstances of individuals who participate in retreats – to the reasons they give for coming and the dimensions of their experience while they attend. At present, though, I hope to illuminate some of the general undercurrents of our modern condition, and so, to consider what kind of world we "leave."

To do this, I engage "postmodern" attitudes and theory. As a diffuse movement that draws upon multiple sources (art, linguistics, architecture...) in this century, and before, and which in recent decades has developed an influential critique of "modernism," postmodernism offers indispensable insights into our life-world. Some dimensions of this critique – those especially of Jean-François Lyotard – will soon enough be treated, but much of it can be said to begin with a systematic disbelief in unifying explanations of, or prescriptions for social, economic, psychological (and so on) reality.

Alongside the deliberations of philosophers, we are often said to live in a postmodern milieu, one in which we assume a stance of disbelief – a certain world-weariness and wariness – by virtue of our participation in contemporary culture and discourse. As the poet Wislawa Szymborska observes:

> Everything the dead predicted has turned out completely different.
> Or a little bit different – which is to say, completely different.[2]

Thus, what are typically called the conditions of "modern" life can from this perspective be termed "postmodern" conditions.[3] Therefore, in what follows two modes of inquiry

take place: one, which considers several moods and expectations of "modernity" from a postmodern perpective – i.e., "(post)modern" conditions; another (developed in the later stages of the chapter), which reflects upon the value and consequences of the "postmodern" attitude as a philosophical stance. Briefly stated, the first is a look at contemporary experience as broadly interpreted while the second considers postmodernism as a theoretically informed undertaking.

Were I to carry forward each of the subjects that stimulated the preceding chapter, we could now begin by considering another piece of music, a particular photograph, perhaps a drawing dimly recalled. Even though the present discussion varies in purpose, any of these "little narratives"[4] could conceivably lead us to an inquiry into modern life. What better way to consider modern sensibilities, for instance, than by considering the sinuous, turbulent "storms of jazz"[5] which have coursed over the musical and cultural landscape of this century (Ellington? Charlie Parker? Monk?)? What of another photograph, carefully selected – and better known, this time – which captures the energy and despair of our age (Kertesz? Bourke-White?)? Surely the movements and countermovements of visual art, too, could be set up as a mirror of our unsettled times, and an augury for the contant overturning which is the postmodern (Van Gogh? Picasso? Pollack?).

I will begin with a novel. Well in advance of making a formal acquaintance with postmodern theorists I encountered something of the this attitude or style in the works of Italo Calvino. In his *Invisible Cities*[6] (hereafter abbreviated: *IC*) several dimensions of our condition are circumscribed within the leisurely conversations of Marco Polo and Kublai Khan: Polo's marvellously retentive (or creative) reports on the cities he has visited (or imagined) describe the extent and minute character of the Great Khan's domain[7] and comprise, in the words of Salman Rushdie, "a sort of fugue on the nature of the City."[8] Prompted by these fabulist tales and visions we encounter the postmodern *in extremis*. They also offer, I believe, an intriguing space which invites our consideration of certain conditions and predicaments of modern life.

Myriad Voices

> In vain, great-hearted Kublai, shall I attempt to describe Zaira, city of high bastions. (*IC* 9)
>
> Now I shall tell you of the city of Zenobia, which is wonderful in this fashion.... (35)
>
> Now I will tell you how Octavia, the spider-web city, is made. (75)

> Recurrent invasions racked the city of Theodora in the centuries of its history. (159)
>
> In Raissa, life is not happy.... (148)
>
> No city is more inclined than Eusapia to enjoy life and flee care. (109)
>
> At Melania, everytime you enter the square, you find yourself caught in a dialogue.... (80)
>
> In Chloe, a great city, the people who move through the streets are all strangers. (51)
>
> It is the mood of the beholder which gives the city of Zemrude its form. (66)

The young Venetian's reports set before Kublai Khan an inordinate variety of sights, histories, tangible details and customs – whether improbable, astonishing or parochial. He speaks of "green canals" and "nubile girls" (9), the "blades of windmills" (20) "flapping curtains, fountains" (66) and "alabaster gates," (105), of a "blind man with a cheetah on a leash" (51). The cities he has visited are endless in their particularity. One, whose citizens stretch string of specific colours between houses as indicators of the relations their owners maintain (76); another built to the disastrous specifications of its astronomers (144); yet another one designed to resemble the pattern of a carpet (96). As a means to "make the leap from life to death less abrupt" (109) one city buries its dead in an identical city in the ground beneath, while another sports an additional city for its unborn (140); there is a city in an interminable state of being built so as to forestall the destruction which inevitably begins upon completion (127); and a city of such indistinct proportions and signs that even its inhabitants are unsure of its location, making it equally impossible to know when one has reached its centre as to know how one might ever leave (156).[9]

How are we to absorb or make coherent the ever-more varied, seemingly disparate, attitudes and conventions with which we are faced – what George Steiner calls the "teeming prodigality of the phenomenal world"?[10] No doubt one response is *ignor*-ance, the overarching indifference or presumption which passes over and refuses to make any contact with the textures of experience with which we are confronted. Another might be seen in the attempts to unify or develop systems to organize this heterogeneity. Perhaps these are connected to the instrumental reason that I will discuss next, where the distinct natures of those people and things around us are recognized only insofar as they offer abilities or resources to achieve the ends we seek.

Then again, what do the plethora of alternate norms, "natural" attitudes and verities make of our own? Our times are blessed and fraught with the myriad voices and per-

spectives of those with whom we choose to, and cannot but, live. Taking seriously this multitude at once celebrates the Other (postmodernism would add: inasmuch as one can understand those whose languages and histories may be incommensurable to one's own) and puts into question our established norms. There is an achievement in this that should not be too quickly dismissed. In one sense it constitutes the "creative turmoil"[11] of these (post)modern conditions, in which contesting, "agonistic"[12] voices have achieved the right to be heard by and contend with one another in search for (forever incomplete) understanding, or simply, for the "sheer pleasure of invention."[13] Here, we encounter Lyotard's postmodernist reading, which emphasizes the playful character of such discourse, in addition (or, due?) to the absence of any contravening authority to bring it to closure through reduction or totalizing vision:[14] "Narrative's strength lies in its capacity to hold together a multiplicity of heterogeneous families of discourse – so it has to be 'inflatable,' if I may put it that way."[15]

Another consequence of taking this rich discourse seriously is marked by ambiguity. Others bring with them their own ways of attending to matters which concern them. One result of attending to these variant perspectives – giving them due regard – is an awakening to the inevitablity and possibilities of interpretation. While these possibilities may be celebrated (as above), this characteristic potentially reduces each of the meanings at which we have arrived to a provisional, perhaps even arbitrary, status. It invests us with an authority to make sense of the signs around us while it renders our meanings provisional, unique – notions that can bear upon little else than our own/culture's history of interpretation. If this matters to us it demands constant discourse with others in order to test these interpretations within a community of speakers. But it has another side, too, which leads us to devalue the sense we make of things in their contingency and transcience – as (merely) another point of view. The fact that others' interpretations are leveled in like fashion may do nothing to shore up our dwindling trust in the nature of meaning. Relativism, perspectivalism, taken to its conclusion renders understandings laboured over with rigour and erudition indistinguishable from the most indifferent of appraisals.

In a sense, being a traveler, Marco Polo may be thought of as a "theorist," from *theōrós*, "spectator." His theory (*theōría*: contemplation, speculation, sight) develops directly out of multiple wonders observed during his journeys. According to Steiner we need to return to the seventeenth century, and before, to regain an understanding of a theorist as one who travels to and formally observes important events. Being a theorist pertains,

that is, "to the deed of witness performed by legates sent, in solemn embassy, to observe oracles spoken or the notes perfomed at the sacred Attic games."[16] As a consequence, Steiner defines a "theorist" as "one who is disciplined in observance, a term itself charged with a two-fold significance of intellectual-sensory perception and religious or ritual conduct."[17] Certainly his journeying and detailed observations qualify Marco Polo in this sense. Even the calm which reigns amid the dialogues in which he partakes fittingly recalls the solemnity of theory's sacred origins. But Steiner seeks to press this point further: a theorist in the original sense is an astute witness of empirical phenomena – like "theory" as understood within the sciences, such a theorist's reports can be corroborated, refined or disproved.[18] (The sun can be shown to orbit around the earth, or the earth to orbit around the sun. *Both* possibilities cannot simultaneously be true.) Thus, as a highly interpretive (or imaginative) traveler Polo's theory better resembles that which is found in the humanities, which is to say that it is not true "theory" at all. (Beethoven's string quartets do not render the trio sonatas of Bach invalid; the dialogues of Plato are unlikely to be *replaced* by Descartes' *Meditations*.) This means, for Steiner, that people speaking of, say, a "theory of criticism" are "either deceiving themselves or purloining from the immense prestige and confidence of science and technology an instrument ontologically inapplicable to their own material."[19]

For Lyotard, however, because theories, observations, proofs of any sort are expressed linguistically, even with reference to science Wittgenstein's observations on "language games" apply. That is, like all arenas of discourse the language of science operates according to internal "game" rules; even its forms of evidence and disputation are internally legitimating and can make no claim to "objective" truth.[20] In this context Marco Polo does qualify as a "theorist," since his discourses operate within, so to speak, the "grammar" of his own travels and sensibilities, and the rules generated within the conversational space (i.e., the language game) that emerges with Kublai Khan.[21] If his historical facticity, his journeys and the cities contained within the geographic dimensions of the Khan's empire make the Venetian a proper subject of modernist discourse, the hermeneutic ambiguity of his perspective and reports, and the very indeterminancy of time and space within which his observations are situated (cities in the sky; aluminum towers...), make of Marco Polo a (post)modern subject *par excellence*.

The Emperor and the Instrumental

> *Contemplating these essential landscapes, Kublai reflected on the invisible order that sustains cities, on the rules that decreed how they rise, take shape and prosper, adapting themselves to the seasons, and then how they sadden and fall in ruins. At times he thought he was on the verge of discovering a coherent, harmonious system underlying the infinite deformities and discords, but no model could stand up to the comparison with the game of chess.* (IC 122)

> *...The Great Khan tried to concentrate on the game: but now it was the game's reason that eluded him. The end of every game is a gain or a loss: but of what? What were the real stakes? At checkmate, beneath the foot of the king, knocked aside by the winner's hand, nothingness remains: a black square, or a white one. By disembodying his conquests to reduce them to the essential, Kublai had arrived at the extreme operation: the definitive conquest, of which the empire's multiform treasures were only illusory envelopes; it was reduced to a square of planed wood.* (IC 131)

Not only where brute conquest is concerned, *any* orientation towards fixed goals is inclined to lead to a subordination of the people and things (i.e., means) needed or used to achieve these ends. It is an operation linked to the denotation, "raw materials." It can occur whenever a forest is converted into "board feet"; instances of this are legion. Charles Taylor identifies this attitude and practice in our world as one of the "malaises of modernity":

> The fear is that things that ought to be determined by other criteria will be decided in terms of efficiency or "cost-benefit" analysis, that the independent ends that ought to be guiding our lives will be eclipsed by the demand to maximize output.[22]

That is, what Taylor terms "instrumental reason"[23] is the manner of reasoning and acting in which the world comes to be regarded as a "neutral domain of potential means to our purposes."[24] In the extreme – say, the case of Kublai Khan – textures, histories and contours which constitute the world are treated in the abstract, are simplified and divested of their unique traits and life. With their value so reduced to specific functions and properties they become unitary and drastically impoverished. But as the emperor discovers, with the process of achievement reduced to its barest operations, meaning is also diminshed and finally absent. Accordingly, whichever the dimension of experience in question, instrumentalism may be seen to draw from our lives the meaning we seek.

> To take an instrumental stance to nature is to cut us off from the sources of meaning in it. An instrumental stance to our feelings divides us within, splits reason from sense. And the atomistic focus on our individual goals dissolves community and divides us from each other.[25]

In part, this can be seen to confirm the insight of phenomenology that "we" and the "world" arise together. Merleau-Ponty observes that "consciousness of the world is not *based* on self-consciousness: they are strictly contemporary. There is a world for me because I am not unaware of myself; and I am not concealed from myself because I have a world."[26] As a result, the "flattening" of the things of the world – their loss of significance and value – is matched by a simultaneous sense of emptiness in ourselves, like an echo, such that the accomplishment of ends becomes, as the blank square of the chessboard has become for Kublai Khan, "an emblem of nothingness."[27]

A curious irony accompanies our participation in instrumental reason. At the risk of its appearing too linear, it can be expressed as follows: by (1) reducing (i.e., through objectifying, quantifying) people and things to those properties we require to reach some end we (2) encounter a pervasive loss of meaning in the midst of our lives which (3) casts a shadow of meaninglessness upon the end itself (what Taylor refers to as the "eclipse of ends"[28]). A similar logic to the one inhering in this condition of meaninglessness may be said to be present in another seeming preoccupation of modernity, that of materialism. Commenting on contemporary Western commercial culture, Mark Edmundson remarks:

> The Internet, TV, and magazines now teem with what I call persona ads, ads for Nikes and Reeboks and Jeeps and Blazers that don't so much endorse the capacities of the product per se as show you what sort of person you will be once you've acquired it. The Jeep ad that features hip, outdoorsy kids whipping a Frisbee from mountaintop to mountaintop isn't so much about what Jeeps can do as it is about the kind of people who own them. Buy a Jeep and be one with them. The ad is of little consequence in itself, but expand its message exponentially and you have the central thrust of current consumer culture – buy in order to be.[29]

To the extent that our identity and agency are defined by forces occupied solely with "market share," the only reward for that form of attention which heeds the insinuations and demands of such "information" may be called an evacuation of spirit.

Both instrumentalism and materialism reduce a person, a creature, an object to some minimal function – instrumental reason to the useable, for the purposes of power or control; materialism to the desirable, for the purposes of consumption. Each is unceasing: power must be maintained and strengthened; desire, renewed. Insofar as the former results in emptiness, the latter may be considered its "logical" antidote, that is, one in which this emptiness, rather than being satiated is intensified, owing to the reciprocal emptying that occurs when something that has been rendered radically valueless is consumed.

Such issues may also figure into the modern sense of restlessness, to which we shall return. As David Loy notes, "Being a means, *Zweckrationalität* [instrumental rationality] is always going somewhere, but, being a means, it can never rest anywhere."[30] What begins out of desire, necessity or habit ends in a radical draining of purpose and significance. With striking symmetry, the devaluation of the world and ourselves is inevitable and simultaneous. It seems unlikely that this is only a (post)modern condition, but, whether it results from, for example, the "disenchantment of the world" or the loss of "older moral horizons"[31] (and although most obvious in the extreme), it can be said to have a place wherever a disregard for the particular occurs.

A Nostalgia

> *"...So then, yours is truly a journey through memory!" The Great Khan, his ears always sharp, sat up in his hammock every time he caught the hint of a sigh in Marco's speech. "It was to slough off a burden of nostalgia that you went so far away!" he exclaimed, or else: "You return from your voyages with a cargo of regrets!"* (IC 98)

> *His repertory could be called inexhaustible, but now he was the one who had to give in. Dawn had broken when he said: "Sire, now I have told you about all the cities I know."*
> *"There is still one of which you never speak."*
> *Marco Polo bowed his head.*
> *"Venice," the Khan said.*
> *Marco Polo smiled. "What else do you believe I have been talking about?"*
> *The emperor did not turn a hair. "And yet I have never heard you mention that name."*
> *And Polo said: "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice."* (IC 86)

The (post)modern condition demands of us forward thinking, movement that is forward looking. It requires not only action but *pro*-action; its reference is to whatever is to come; it has turned away from the past. Indeed – and here, Lyotard's technical usage of the "modern," is invoked – part of the "very idea of modernity is closely related with the principle that it is both possible and necessary to break with tradition and institute absolutely new forms of living and thinking."[32] To be "modern" is to be *advanced*. In large measure, participation in modern life is a given (or, to the extent that we are unaware of our complicity, it is *taken*). Yet, in addition to the myriad alternatives to our own (waning) certainties, the rapidity of modern life and technical achievements can increase our sense of loss for what is left behind. Whatever the satisfactions offered by participating in modern forms of life they are often attenuated by the anxiety brought on by consciously pulling away, perhaps irrevocably, from those apparent moorings that once offered consolation to life's natural hazards and losses.

One form of nostalgia, or homesickness (the "pain," *álgos*, of wishing "to return home," *nóstos*), then, is reflected in the multiple regrets which are confirmed with each new journey Marco Polo undertakes. All of his travels bear the mark of the same desire, all of the cities visited, of the same home, and it is here that Marco's predicament – and possibly our own – verges on the inconsolable. Alongside the question of his physical capacity to return to Venice (so great is its distance from Kanbalu or Karazan) there hovers the more insistent one: what would he return *to*?[33] The memory of his home suffuses each of the reports he provides – in this way, every one of them different and the same. If Polo's longing to see again his beloved Venice is a token of modern life – of everything which is left behind in order to advance – the characteristics of his homesickness are "postmodern" insofar as the overlay of language and memory lead him to question the very *existence* of this home.

> *"Memory's images, once they are fixed in words, are erased," Polo said. "Perhaps I am afraid of losing Venice all at once, if I speak of it. Or perhaps, speaking of other cities, I have lost it, little by little."* (IC 87)

At its heart this is either a pain born of legitimate difficulty (Steiner's "real presences") or an empty, throbbing nostalgia for what is absent, like a phantom limb – and which, what is more, *was never there*. Along with Marco Polo, we generally assume the former (and why not? he *did* eventually return to Venice); that theory and practice known as poststructuralism assumes the latter, and in so doing transforms the nature of our predicament.

What we (and the Venetian) encounter here is one aspect of the modern condition which Lyotard identifies: the "nostalgia for presence," for the "real," for that which is conceivable but unpresentable.[34] (He speaks in similar terms of our "mourning" over all that has been unrealised in "modern" life, in particular: the unified, long-promised emancipation of humanity.[35]) Modernist perspectives have been formed on the basis of such foundations, those "certainties" which found or undergird the manners of life in which we participate. Postmodernism questions or negates these foundations, while poststructuralism is the literary application of this critique. What seems to its critics to be gratuitous "acrobatics"[36] and "paralyzing skepticism"[37] is for poststructuralists a liberating play of language that has been freed from the constraints of historical causality, social context and authorial intention.[38]

All such (ab)uses are warranted from within this perspective, for the absence of the "real," referred to above, connotes the lack of any/all of the theological or metaphysical

absolutes to which humans have long been oriented. While their traces inhere in language, it is a language which has arisen solely from within the infinite iterations of convention and contestation. Language, in other words, is entirely self-referential. *That* to which it refers is silent, untenable, vacant. The negation which occurs in poststructuralism may begin with "constructs" such as *God* or *Being* but its application is pervasive, undermining all of the verities or presumptions which have traditionally been adhered to and have provided our secure foundations (*sic*). These include even the relationship between signifier and signified, that is, word and world. It would seem to be this formally obscure well-spring of life and expression – regarding the origins or "onto-theological" (Heidegger) basis of which we can know nothing – that Paul Valéry evokes here:

> One must go back to the *source* – which is not the *origin*. The *origin*, in all, is *imaginary*. The *source* is the fact within which the imaginary is proposed: water wells up there. Beneath, I do not know what takes place.[39]

Marco Polo's dilemma pivots on the agency of language. Should he have spoken of Venice more frequently, giving his memories flesh and form? Or, since the referent of language is the fecundity of language itself – *nothing more* – have even his oblique references now denuded those impressions that once gave him solace, making any return impossible? Between his longing reminiscences of home and his questions of its present viability as a destination Marco struggles in oscillation between modern and postmodern worlds.

Overarching Ambitions

> *The Great Khan contemplates an empire covered with cities that weigh upon the earth and upon mankind, crammed with wealth and traffic, overladen with ornaments and offices, complicated with mechanisms and hierarchies, swollen, tense, ponderous.* (IC 73)

> *"And yet I know," he would say, "that my empire is made of the stuff of crystals, its molecules arranged in a perfect pattern. Amid the surge of the elements, a splendid hard diamond takes shape, an immense, faceted, transparent mountain. Why do your travel impressions stop at disappointing appearances, never catching this implacable process? Why do you linger over inessential melancholies? Why do you hide from the emperor the grandeur of his destiny?"*
>
> *And Marco answered: "While at a sign from you, sire, the unique and final city raises its stainless walls, I am collecting the ashes of the other possible cities that vanish to make room for it, cities that can never be rebuilt or remembered.* (IC 60)

In the reveries of the emperor we might suppose that many devices of abstraction (recall the chess game) are needed to reduce the inconceivable richness of commerce, customs, religion, craft, husbandry, and local intrigue to manageable proportions. At their most ambitious his designs aspire to achieve an eternal state of order which for all its improbability he finds beautiful, since it is also very simple. Yet, as Marco Polo understands, this is a perfection won at the price of the teeming life it is meant (or is it?) to contain.

In a curious metaphoric parallel, Merleau-Ponty uses this same ("flawed") image to describe the abyss between what we conceive of the world and that perpetually unseen debt – the unacknowledged fund of experience – we owe to the perceptions upon which our ideas are constructed.

> Objective thought is unaware of the subject of perception. This is because it presents itself with the world ready made, as the setting of every possible event, and treats perception as one of these events....
>
> There can be no question of describing perception itself as one of the facts thrown up in the world, since we can never fill up, in the picture of the world, that gap which we ourselves are, and by which it comes into existence for someone, since perception is the "flaw" in this "great diamond."[40]

We might say that both instances bring into perspective an invisible, or unseen, world which otherwise sits just outside of our focal range. In either case we experience a variety of alienation: Whether, for instance, in the experiential domain it is the impoverishment gained through facile opinions which continually pass over the vast resources of our experience and sensibility, or, in the economic domain, the collective, anonymous indecency of partaking of commodities acquired, but scarcely acknowledged, out of the labours and natural inheritance of others.

Eventually, however, signs of erosion become transparent or intrude upon such easy, aloof reveries. For us, these come with growing urgency as a century of unparalleled confidence and violence draws to a close....

A Collapse of the Modern

> In the lives of emperors there is a moment which follows pride in the boundless extension of the territories we have conquered and the melancholy and relief of knowing that we shall soon give up any thought of knowing and understanding them.... It is the desperate moment when we discover that this empire which had seemed to us the sum of all wonders, is an endless, formless ruin, that corruption's gangrene has spread too far to be healed by our scepter, that the triumph over enemy sovereigns has made us the heirs of their long undoing. (*IC* 5)

We are living, it has become a commonplace to observe, in "postmodern" times. So pronounced are the infamies and horrors of this century, so deep the rift cleaved in the continuum of human history, that nothing but a repudiation of the very underpinnings of our past, it seems, will do. Yet it is characteristic of "modern" movements to stand against what has come before, to generate definitive interpretations of previous modes of social organisation, statecraft, musical composition, and so on, and to oppose them with something revolutionary, and thereby, "to become self-consciously new."[41] As we shall see, for its part postmodernism may be observed to employ (although its adherents might dispute this) what is *essential* of this modernist impulse.

Whatever the modulations of remorseless calculation Kublai Khan required to expand and administer his empire we (and *we* are implicated, note) see him, above, contemplating its certain demise. It will be some other man (almost certainly a man) who will boldly conceive of what is to take its place, even if his only innovation is to ratify the name of the new emperor – such are the repetitions to which history is heir. Indeed, a characteristic of revolutions of this kind is that once established they generate their own legitimacy, whether through brute force, gradual consensus, or theoretic elaboration (or some combination of these). An example: nearly twenty-five hundred years prior to the reign of the Middle Kingdom by the "barbarian" pastoralists to its west, a leader known to history as the Duke of Chou formulated the doctrine of *t'ien ming*, the "mandate of heaven," to establish for the newly ensconced Chou dynasty, and ever after, the retroactive divine sanction for their earthly sovereignty. But I digress.

Postmodernism does not situate itself in some future *after* this history, these events, or, for that matter, the present; rather, it is *part* of the modern in that it has absorbed the suspicion modern movements maintain towards their past by uncovering what Lyotard calls the "'lack of reality' of reality."[42] As he notes in relation to the sweeping currents of modern art, "All that has been received, if only yesterday... must be suspected. What space does Cézanne challenge? The Impressionists'. What objects do Picasso and Braque attack? Cézanne's."[43]

It would seem partly out of moral conscience,[44] partly out of an ongoing philosophical inquiry into the conditions for its (philosophy's) own possibility that the disruptions of postmodernism have developed. From this perspective we are situated in a period shaken by an irremediable rupture of modernist assumptions concerning encompassing visions, unifying voices and self-legitimating interpretations. That is, at a crucial point postmodernism sharpens the critical edge which, in its *initial* expression, constitutes the

modern. Rather than waiving this critical impulse of contestation, postmodernism expresses ongoing suspicion or "incredulity" towards what it deems the modernist "metanarratives,"[45] by which it understands those discourses which legitimate power, authority and hierarchy through, for the most part, their denial of particularity and ambiguity. What postmodernism offers in their place – though this would not be seen as a "replacement" grand narrative, since no truth is claimed for them – is a celebration through dissenting discourse of gendered, cultural, linguistic, textual heterogeneity.

It can be added that there is another assumption laid bare in the postmodern critique. It is not only the grand narratives which are shown to be contingent, "logocentric" formulations lacking any claims upon us. Further deepening the frayed, ungrounded, tenuous nature of (post)modern life, we too – that is, our very integrity as coherent subjects able to bring meaning to, and find meaning in our experience of the world – *we too* are brought into question. It is an ontological ungroundedness, therefore, which extends beyond what we think to what we are. How is one (*sic*) to witness with any degree of composure the loss of *this*? (I said at the outset that this would be an excursion *in extremis*, remember.)

A Restlessness

Even though this has been from the start conceived as a "little narrative," it bears repeating that it would be foolhardy to designate any single, essential, condition to be that alone which enlivens or troubles us in our present age. The characteristics of our (post)modern conditions developed here are naturally incomplete. Similarly, it is true that more remains to be said about the creative, invigorating qualities of postmodern discourse, about the important questions it poses, and about its potential to dislodge and dispel unexamined attitudes, to disturb us into opening anew to the forces and voices which surround and inhabit us. Just so. But in this I have been drawn primarily to comment with broad strokes upon the confusing, often conflicting multiformity of this discourse, its erosion of seemingly well-grounded assumptions, and of some of the consequences of living uncentred amidst the heaving turbulence of our age. In this final set of reflections I wish to raise one more issue which, as much as the others, I expect, colours these "times" we experience, contributing to our mood of disquiet, and engendering in some of us the desire to/for "retreat."

I refer to *haste*.

Our acquaintance with Marco Polo and the Great Khan, to this time, has been with men facing one another in an attitude of ease at day's end, two men engaged in discourse which, for all its wide-ranging, meticulous nature, has absorbed into itself the lengthening, unhurried rays of the late sun. As a result, what I wish to turn our attention to now requires a journey somewhat on the margins of their conversations, during the midday, when these men, in particular Polo, are engaged in the middle of their lives. Of the inevitable end to Kublai's infinite ambitions we have learned; what becomes of the Venetian's unceasing journeying?

> *Kublai: I do not know when you have had time to visit all the countries you describe to me. It seems to me you have never moved from this garden.*
>
> *Polo: Everything I see and do assumes meaning in a mental space where the same calm reigns as here, the same penumbra, the same silence streaked by the rustling of leaves. At the moment when I concentrate and reflect, I find myself again, always, in this garden, at this hour of the evening, in your august presence, though I continue, without a moment's pause, moving up a river green with crocodiles or counting barrels of salted fish being lowered into the hold.* (IC 103)

> *By now, from that real or hypothetical past of his, he is excluded; he cannot stop; he must go on to another city, where another of his pasts awaits him, or something perhaps that had been a possible future of his is now someone else's present. Futures not achieved are only branches of the past; dead branches.* (IC 29)

> *"...The city exists and it has a simple secret; it knows only departures, not returns."* (IC 56)

As usual we discern in these conjectures from *Invisible Cities* many allusions and enigmas. Yet it is clear that, whatever we may be inclined to believe from the calm circumstances of his convervations with the Mongol ruler, Marco Polo is a man "on the move." Note, too, that it is a certain kind of movement into which he is urged: as a (truly) postmodern "theorist," Polo's journeys are incessant and allow no repose; they occur *"...without a moment's pause."*

This should give us pause. One of the peculiarities of postmodernism, it would seem, is that no dismissal or qualification of nonsequitors need occur: "Marco Polo sits in regular ease with Kublai Khan *but* (paradoxically) is also in constant travel" can now read: "Polo converses in undisturbed calm with the Great Khan *and* has no moment's rest from his journeys."

Then too, language itself appears not only to permit but to reveal, or generate, such ambiguity. Steiner notes: "Where it is most expressive, language, art, music makes sensible

to us the root of secrecy within itself. The arc of metaphor... spans an undeclared foundation."[46] Following Plato's distinction between limited, fixed things, and unlimited events which do not rest, Gilles Deleuze has written at length of what he calls pure becoming or events.[47] While the limited dimension of things seems well ensconced in language ("She set the book on the desk"), language also permits (reveals, generates...) a surprising facility to exceed the apparent stability of objects, what he calls the "profound and secret dualism hidden in sensible and material bodies themselves."[48] Deleuze finds in *Alice* and *Through the Looking-Glass* numerous references to this – to reversals of causality, time or direction, for instance, or, in this case, to language's capacity both to fix and transcend limits: "A red-hot poker will burn you if you hold it too long... if you cut your finger *very* deeply with a knife, it usually bleeds."[49] Similarly, reflecting on the sentence "Alice becomes larger," we can note that she is growing bigger than she was but that she is still smaller than she will later become. This is clear enough. But he also shows that it can reveal, beneath this transparent meaning, a deep ambiguity in the heart of a moment of becoming – that she does both at the same time. That is, Alice has become bigger than she was *and/even while* she has become smaller than she will be. "This," says Deleuze, " is the simultaneity of a becoming whose characteristic is to elude the present."[50]

Where does this leave us in view of Marco Polo, or our present condition? I suggest that it is within this peculiar, unfounded, confounding, tension which is the (post)modern that the haste[51] of which I speak – Marco Polo's *subtext*, our *life-world* – can be understood.

Each of us knows that among its many uses, language may be a means of obfuscation or cunning. Yet language also seems to allow our saying what lies beneath or outside of the delimitations of understanding. At times language itself belies the solid "facticity" of our world, revealing an ungrounded, unsettling process of life only barely concealed beneath our conventions, habits and certainties. In this context our disquiet would seem well founded. And if we take at all seriously the ongoing emergence expressed within the undercurrents of language, we might conclude that unresting movement is constantly demanded of us, simply in order to remain apace of the eventful becoming which constitutes ourselves and the world.

Let me return to, and continue, Lyotard's definition of the precise impulse which is the "postmodern":

> All that has been received, if only yesterday... must be suspected. What space does Cézanne challenge? The Impressionists'. What objects do Picasso and Braque attack? Cézanne's.... In an amazing acceleration, the generations precipitate themselves. A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in its nascent state, and this state is constant.[52]

The postmodern traveler/theorist struggles without rest in his or her endeavours, a restlessness which, owing to its "amazing acceleration" is unabating. Postmodernism at this initial point, perpetually beginning again, is urged by... what? In one sense, a philosophic honesty that refuses to settle, owing to its implacable critique. This mode of restlessness can be regarded an authentic consequence of bearing witness to the irrepressible ambiguities of our existential, historical, etc., situation(s). It is also open for us to ask if restlessness can or *should* be avoided: is life not bound to be a busy affair? Indeed, Hannah Arendt notes that for Hegel, "'restlessness is the ground of Being'; it is the price paid for life."[53] Arendt further shows that this is related to Hegel's understanding of "will" as that which projects itself into the future, attempting to accomplish what is merely potential in the *empty Now*.[54] Only in old age, nearing death, when one's thinking casts itself reflectively upon that which has been accomplished by the will, in the past, is tranquillity attained.[55] This can be viewed otherwise;[56] then again, we might ask whether there isn't greater need for regular ease. For that matter, while the fact that death approaches seems clear, are we actually so certain *when* it is approaching?

Like any of us, most likely, I am subject to many of what have been called here the "conditions and predicaments of the (post)modern." To recall a few: an occasional hollow sense of meaninglessness, an urgency to "advance" even in the face of confusion over what to be and do, an indistinct and sometimes distinct longing for that which lies *in absentia*, a periodic desire for certainty, and so on. It happens that during the process of composing these thoughts I have been displaced (voluntarily) from my home in order to "sit" the large home of friends. As a result, added to my unsettled labours and periods of angst related to the enterprise of writing, there was for several days an angular sense of being-out-of-place. Feeling, at first, conspicuous in these fine surroundings – sometimes wondering at their nearness to extravagance; wondering sometimes what urges our aesthetic tastes to vary so – this same awkwardness shadowed my earnest attempts to gain lucidity. Gradually, these gave way to other murmurings and recollections, so that now, when I move from room to room at night closing windows and blinds, checking doors, my thoughts have begun to touch upon another time.

Not many years ago there was *a death* here.

Recalling Deleuze's revelations, I should restate this. We say we have witnessed *"a* birth" since the event is remarkable and singular, and the being who is born is, prior to this, unknown to us or anyone; unnamed, even. As the infant's life continues he or she will immediately begin to become someone, yet it seems the birth is most eventful in its newness, as a beginning pure and simple. And the birth marks a particular ending, as well (beyond the *utter* dependency of the being-to-be-born) – that of the woman's *expectancy*, who in her own turn, of course, becomes born into motherhood. Conversely, since a "death" is the ending of a unique continuum, a dense, shared history of particularity, even an anonymous death is necessarily the death of "someone."... Then again, to be accurate I was not present for the *moment* of my friend's death (insofar as death occurs *at once*), but rather, was frequently present during several years of, and up to a few hours prior to what had gradually become her dying. This dying culminated in *her* death....

We who knew this woman regarded her dying to be both prolonged and premature. However, not unlike her life itself, my good friend's death assumed many forms: joy, inquiry, courage, gratitude, no less than an ordeal sometimes beyond patience where pain has no name and our questions and purposes confront their finitude.[57] It cannot have been an easy thing. Yet, even amid the prolonged turmoil of her final hours an intrinsic stillness could be discerned, as if the searing disciplines of her illness were now giving this woman the strength of being to remain alert to those awakenings or reawakenings that she had so generously earned. Dying is seldom easy: in spite of a life with few conspicuous troubles, I have this on good authority. But I have also seen that it can be done well, that a human being can be ennobled, somehow, right in the middle of all the loss and helplessness of it, such that one's passing is as good as it can be and may leave something deep and enduring in those who remain.[58]

Now I see that in trying to be clear about this "mobile and precise point,"[59] the problems of articulation are already ramifying and folding over themselves. But in speaking of this I recognize an emerging responsibility that gauges my words to the profusion of a life which eludes and overwhelms them. I will stop here since it seems there can be no end of beginnings where "becoming" is at issue.

If we are consigned ever to begin, if the postmodern resides precisely at the inception of the modern, where it turns against the refuted past, no theoretic mooring, no tradition, memory, verity, no consolation or achievement may be relied upon. Although conceptu-

ally revivifying (in *theory*), certain debilitating consequences of this (dis)position must be acknowledged. For it is not only the homogenizing forces of such "modernist" assumptions as Patriarchy or State, but the nourishment of meaning, worth and identity within the lives of individuals, families, communities, which are at issue. Beyond exposing the authentic difficulties or *aporias* of life, (post)modernism – meaning, here, both our general conditions and those theoretic elaborations upon these conditions – can deepen and radicalize this difficulty by unsettling or unseating us from the situations in which we must live these difficult lives. It offers, *by definition*, no space in which to reconsider, nor, in the midst of its haste, time in which to respond.

Thus it may be asked: Are we also consigned to die in haste?[60] Do we hope that in the urgent preoccupations of the present the subjects of dying and death will, as is the case within the recursive (re)readings of the novel, be indefinitely deferred? Do we forget that the true *subjects* of dying and death are you and me? We may sometimes we give this impression, but as Alphonso Lingis observes:

> Dying takes time; it extends a strange time that undermines the time one anticipates, a time without a future, without possibilities, where there is nothing to do but endure the presence of time. What is impending is absolutely out of reach: incomprehendable, unnegatable, unconfrontable, and unpostponable.[61]

In the remorseless, incessant probing of (post)modern incredulity we need a periodic, *given* situation which – in all its contingency – is allowed as *that* wherein we breathe life into our world of ambiguities, affections and obligations.

> *And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."* (*IC* 165)

Merleau-Ponty has said that a philosopher moves back and forth between ignorance and knowledge. He identifies, as well, a vital *rest* in this movement. If modernism is the movement towards indubitable knowledge, where the metanarrative organizes or reduces phenomena into the "known," postmodernism can be understood as the unceasing movement away from knowledge, to ignorance. Postmodernism does not claim to have overcome the modern. Its contribution is not to be found afterwards, at the end of the modern, but at the "nascent point," the critical edge which turns from the past. What is more, this move(ment) is *constant*, perpetual.

So too, while living, is the breath. Even so, the constancy of breath is punctuated by a natural interval, a medium of space. Once expelled the breath will rest for a moment, empty, at its ebb, and even in its fullness, when inhalation is completed, our breath finds a slight pause, much as a ball thrown upwards will briefly linger at its crest before descending. (True, periods of great exertion do not permit these rests, but – and surely this is the point – *neither can these periods be sustained*.) Note that the conditions we are addressing here are different: *no sooner* is one breath expelled than another is taken. Neither emptiness nor fullness is even momentarily retained. The movement of beginning is *im*-mediate.

To neglect the movement which is natural to respiration – to disallow this pause in one's haste – is to risk growing faint, lightheaded. Our (post)modern conditions should not be mistaken for the astonished dizziness experienced by Theaetetus, wonder-struck interlocutor of Socrates; instead, they are often mirrored more faithfully by the breathless urgency of those in need of a moment's ease (a "breather"). Where, in the case of the modern perspective, the movement may tend or *lean* towards the consolations of knowledge and certainty, in the postmodern (i.e., as a conscious philosophic stance) its opposing movement is deliberately maintained, meaning that the interval of rest that Merleau-Ponty considers equally necessary for philosophy, is intentionally lacking.[62] Speaking metaphorically, I suggest that one of the difficulties attendant upon us is that the modulating rhythms of respiration through which life is continually refreshed are at risk of being overtaken – in our haste, during such times – by a hyperventilation.

NOTES

[1] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. John Wild, James Edie and John O'Neill (Evanston IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1988), 5.

[2] Wislawa Symborska, "The Letters of the Dead," *View with a Grain of Sand: Selected Poems*, trans. S. Baranczak and C. Cavanagh (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1995), 71.

[3] Accordingly, I will throughout adhere to a distinction between "modern"/"postmodern" (our times, conditions) and "postmodernism"/"postmodernist" (a theoretical position).

[4] Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. G. Bloomington and B. Massumi (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1984), 60.

[5] Thomas Merton, *A Thomas Merton Reader*, ed. Thomas McDonnell (New York: Doubleday, 1974), 63.

[6] Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. W. Weaver (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974).

[7] Calvino's licence derives from the old account itself: "On his part, perceiving that the Great Khan took a pleasure in hearing accounts of whatever was new to him respecting the customs and manners of people, and the peculiar circumstances of distant countries, he endeavoured, wherever he went, to obtain correct information on these subjects, and made notes of all he saw and heard, in order to gratify the curiosity of his master." – *The Travels of Marco Polo*, trans. Manuel Komroff (New York: The Modern Library, 1953), 13-14.

[8] Salman Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London; Granta Books, 1991), 258.

[9] In an essay, Calvino observes: "Knowledge as multiplicity is the thread that binds together the major works both of what is called modernism and what goes by the name of the postmodern, a thread – over and above all the labels attached to it – that I hope will continue into the next millenium." – Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millenium* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 116.

[10] George Steiner, *Real Presences* (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), 200.

[11] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 66.

[12] Ibid., 10.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Such refusal of closure occurs even where "our" emancipation is concerned. For Lyotard this is merely a call which leads to the reduction of particular individuals and groups ("they") into a single, unproblematic identity ("we"). See Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1992), 26-33.

[15] Ibid., 31. Although sharply critical of many of the moves of postmodernism, Terry Eagleton expresses some appreciation for this emphasis on liberated discourse: "[Postmodernism] is among other things the ideology of a specific historical epoch in the West, where reviled and humiliated groups are beginning to recover something of their history and selfhood." *The Illusions of Postmodernism* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), 121. However, Eagleton is among other things very critical of the postmodernist suspicion of any interests seeking people's emancipation, as discussed above (idid., see n. 12).

[16] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 69.

[17] Ibid. As Bernd Jager shows, in his "Theorizing, Journeying,Dwelling," *Duquesne Studies in Phenomenological Psychology*, ed. A. Giorgi, C. Fischer, E. Murray, 235-60 (Pittsburgh: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1975), a theorist was also a *participant* who acquired knowledge and experience in the course of his journeying and observing.

[18] Or, as Jager notes, a journeying theorist must eventually return home, where his or her "theories" can be shared and tested: "Homecoming constitutes the great reflective and hermaneutic task without which theoretical effort remains incomplete" (ibid., 259).

[19] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 75.

[20] Lyotard looks to Aristotle for support in this: "Even more modern was his suggestion that scientific knowledge, including its pretension to express the being of the referent, is composed only of arguments and proofs – in other words, of dialectics" (*Postmodern Condition*, 29).

[21] Interestingly, each of these thinkers identifies a similar "mood" underlying the development of theory. Theory for Steiner is "impatience systematized" (*Real Presences*, 86); it would appear to be one aspect of the fourfold "hermeneutic motion" that he sets out in *After Babel* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1975), namely, "aggression" (see, 296-98). For Lyotard, similarly, it emerges out of the "domain of general agonistics" (*Postmodern Condition*, 10), i.e., whereby one struggles in a "contest," *agōn*.

[22] Charles Taylor, *The Malaises of Modernity* (Concord ON: Anasi, 1991), 5.

[23] Ibid., 4.

[24] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1989), 500.

[25] Ibid., 500-501.

[26] M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), 298.

[27] Calvino, *Six Memos*, 72.

[28] Taylor, *Malaises of Modernity*, 10.

[29] Mark Edmundson, "On the Uses of a Liberal Education: I. As Lite Entertainment for Bored College Students," *Harper's Magazine* (September, 1997): 41.

[30] Loy is discussing the work of Max Weber and Georg Simmel here. "Preparing for Something that Never Happens: The Means/Ends Problem in Modern Culture," *International Studies in Philosophy* 26, no. 4 (1995): 62.

[31] To some degree I am conflating the reasons Taylor gives for the emergence of instrumental reason and "individualism," here, which, in addition to "loss of freedom," comprise the three "malaises" he identifies in *Malaises of Modernity* (see 2-10). In his *Sources of the Self*, Charles Taylor identifies three somewhat different "zones" or "areas of tension," those concerning (1) the moral sources underpinning the goods or standards to which we aspire (495); (2) the "conflict between disengaged instrumentalism and the Romantic or modernist protest against it"; and (3) whether our "moral standards are not incompatible" with a richer or more authentic fulfillment of life (498-99).

[32] Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, 76.

[33] *"...the traveler's past changes according to the route he has followed"* (*IC* 28).

[34] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 79.

[35] Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, 26.

[36] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 85.

[37] Eagleton, *Illusions of Postmodernism*, 27.

[38] Steiner is especially vexed by what can appear to be the arrogance of this: "In a profoundly nihilistic play on words – but how else can words be used? – the poem, the painting, the piece of music, but especially the literary text inasmuch as it is verbal, are seen as the pre-text to and for the commentary. Poems simply pre-figure, this is to say anticipate, their own misreadings" (*Real Presences*, 123).

[39] Paul Valéry, *Cahiers* vol. 23 (Paris, Centre National de Recherche Scientifique, 1957-61), 592; cited in John Llewelyn, "The Origin and End of Philosophy," in *Philosophy and Non-Philosophy since Merleau-Ponty*, ed. H.J. Silverman (rpt. ed. Evanston, IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1997), 197.

[40] Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 207. The translator, Colin Smith, notes that the image of the great diamond comes from a poem by Paul Valéry.

[41] Hugh J. Silverman, "Postmodernism, Language and Textuality: Part 1," *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* 4, no. 1 (1986): 3.

[42] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 77.

[43] Ibid., 79.

[44] See, for instance, Lyotard, *Postmodern Explained*, 18: "I would argue that the project of modernity (the realization of universality) has not been forsaken or forgotten but destroyed, 'liquidated.' ... 'Auschwitz' can be taken as a paradigmatic name for the tragic 'incompletion' of modernity."

[45] Ibid., xxiv.

[46] Steiner, *Real Presences*, 176. Eagleton's critique of postmodernism focuses more on its effacement of history and its irresponsibility towards issues of ethics and emancipation, but he too is sensitive to the possibilities of language beyond these inter-referential "games": "To inhabit a language is already by that very token to inhabit a good deal more than it, and that there is that which transcends language is exactly what the interior of our language informs us of" (*Illusions of Postmodernism*, 13).

[47] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. M. Lester with C. Stivale; ed. C.V. Boundas (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1990).

[48] Ibid., 2.

[49] Ibid., 3.

[50] Ibid., 1.

[51] It bears noting that "haste" is linked etymologically to "hate," suggesting that an undercurrent of aversion and violence lurks beneath some of our hurried preoccupations. See *The Oxford Dictionary of Etymological English*, ed. C.T. Onions (Oxford: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1966), s.v.

[52] Lyotard, *Postmodern Condition*, 79.

[53] Hannah Arendt, *The Life of the Mind*, 2 vols. in 1: *Willing* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1977), 2: 42.

[54] Ibid., 41.

[55] Ibid., 42-43.

[56] Arendt contrasts this at length with Heidegger's contention that we do not so much express ourselves through will, as we are willed (ibid., 49). Rather, it is in thinking of Being that we most deeply reverberate with Being (174), the natural response to which is *thanking* (185).

[57] Regarding this place of extreme difficulty, Alphonso Lingis notes: "The intensity of pain does not throw one back on one's own resources or one's potential; it backs one up against oneself, one is unable to flee and unable to retreat from oneself." – *The Community of Those Who Have Nothing in Common* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994), 174.

[58] These observations are derived from my essay entitled "Wonder: What Becomes of It?" in *Nature, Environment and Me: Personal Explorations in a Deteriorating World*, ed. M. Aleksiuk and T. Nelson (submitted).

[59] Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, 153.

[60] Speaking of the responsibility of a physician, J.H. van den Berg, *The Psychology of the Sickbed* (New York: Humanities Press, 1980), observes, "To deny a person the right to contemplate approaching death actually means denying him the right to see his life as a whole, to live it as a complete life" (54). Lingis speaks in a similar vein of the wholeness that may be accomplished in dying, or in confronting the spectre of death which accompanies us in periods of anxiety: "in resolutely advancing upon the possibilities that are possible only for me, revealed by the death that is coming for me, I recognize in the immanence of death, not a fatality but an imperative that directs me into the figure of being that is mine alone to be" (*Community*, 169-70).

[61] Lingis, *Community*, 173-74.

[62] That is, notwithstanding the many insights postmodernism offers upon our present, fraught conditions, it is one thing to assert that incessant critique clearly *marks* these conditions, and quite another to assert that this critique *must* (also) be unceasingly applied to each and every one of our experiences and understandings. I wish to affirm the former without (uncritically) endorsing the latter.

3

THE RETREAT: *An Introduction*

For a time the teacher listens while the student haltingly reveals an elusive, simmering concern. The dimensions of the problem hadn't emerged this fully until now but only a little relief comes with its expression: an uncomfortable residue of ambiguity remains to preoccupy and unsettle. Even so, under no particular press of time, they sit with it awhile. There is, if it can be said, an atmosphere of stirring liminality; the student can do nothing but persist. The teacher quietly notes in appreciation these efforts; but then, unexpectedly, asks an oblique, perplexing question. Disturbed *for an instant the student stumbles to respond, until – now abruptly sensing something unfamiliar – the question itself traces a quickening path through experience, and is followed, to a place of quiet transparency and meaning. Soon, a lively bodily knowing becomes palpable. That recent, distant concern dissolves: its texture to mind, its location in body, dissipated....: Both student and teacher are charged with a resounding stillness as the experience unfolds, and is shared.*

Beginnings, as I never cease having to learn, are at once perpetually necessary and impossible: necessary for life to be continually renewed, impossible to get right or, in retrospect – and with any exactitude – to find. Is one bound to experience the sudden opening of wonder while in meditation? Does a dedication to meditation retreats necessarily reveal a dissatisfaction with the groundless heterogeneity of our times; is this activity in tacit collusion with, does it seek to repudiate, the "grand narrative"? It will be some time before we are in a position to know whether meditation does or can offer a response to the postmodern condition recently articulated, whether it does or can nurture the sort of ground congenial to "wonder." Instead, in this chapter I will describe my own first exposure to meditation in a retreat setting. Later, this setting will be examined in more detail and with broader reference to the range of experiences reported. Here, as a means to introduce an environment with certain unique aspects, I have in mind an *easy going* telling which does not move too quickly or mean to explain too much.

sity student, and still, as it were, blinking and perplexed in the light and noise of the world.

The chance to attend a weekend meditation "retreat" sprang up unexpectedly one day, at the invitation of a friend. The retreat would offer an opportunity to practise a Buddhist meditation technique known as "mindfulness." Sometimes it was referred to as "insight meditation." I'd recently had a brief introduction to this form of meditation and, being attracted to the idea of the silence and discipline of such a setting, decided to attend. It was a "serious" thing to embark on, I imagined, and one that drew me. Also, something about going on a retreat was vaguely compelling: might it be an activity that could generate some of the answers I sought?

The retreat was held in an rangy two-storied building in the city. Each of the meditators was given a small room containing a bed, closet and sink; sitting meditation took place in a large room from which the furniture had been removed. We arranged ourselves on little squares of living space along the four walls. I had brought a mat and a couple of pillows for sitting on and looked around at the array of cushions, foam pads and special stools being set up by the experienced retreat-goers.

Since we have arrived in the late afternoon, before beginning the practice itself there is an evening meal. I know only three of the twenty-or-so people present, and spend most of my time observing and listening to others:

> Hi, you're back! ...
>
> I missed you in February. How's Bill? ...
>
> The twins? – you'd hardly recognise them from one month to the next, they're growing so much....
>
> Well, something brought me back! I'm pretty sure I'll figure out how to do it one of these years! (laughter) ...
>
> Still at the old job? Oh, sorry, do you know Jason? I thought you two'd met. Jason, this is Sandra – she's been coming to these things for years. Was it last September we met, Sandra? ...
>
> I'd really like my husband to try it, you know? He never seems too interested but I just know it would do him good....

By the time we had finished eating the teacher had arrived from the airport, so as we began to make our way into the room to begin our first session I caught a glimpse of her. My earliest impression? Curiously, it was that when she giggled her tongue went to her front teeth, like a child. The greetings were very warm: hugs and laughter – many people here evidently knew her – and

when she and I were introduced she said, by way of explanation or perhaps to put me at ease, "we're not too formal around here." She spoke with an Austrian accent. Her hair was closely cropped and I guessed her to be in her sixties. She offered a warm, firm hand in greeting: "My name is Anagarika." This, it turned out, was short for "Anagarika Dhamma Dinna," the name given to her when she had been ordained in Sri Lanka, many years before, as a Buddhist nun. I had never met a Buddhist.

Most likely everyone has seen a statue of the Buddha (or a picture of one) sitting in meditation. Surely it is one of the commonest images we possess, in the West, of the "exotic" and "mystical" temperament of the East. That more recent picture of cities teeming with motorcycles and humid, insatiable commerce may not, even now, have fully supplanted for us the image of the Buddha's serene (expressionless?) visage. Nowadays, one occasionally comes across a magazine image of someone meditating: a person sitting with eyes closed and an even countenance, perhaps a faint smile. Of course, we need only take a bus to work every morning to know that it is foolish to read too much into someone's expression – not that this prevents the inevitable, fleeting appraisal. What does this picture convey? We may be inclined to agree, for instance, that this meditator's expression mirrors an inner ease, the absence of those troubles that so easily sap our energies and abilities. And why not? It all looks very relaxing. Perhaps time spent doing this cultivates inner reserves which impart a poise that carries one into normal life, as well? Then again, maybe the unmoving figure in the photograph seems engaged in a more self-centred pursuit, as one determined not so much to earn peace as to make it. What good could it do anyone? And those closed eyes, are they shut against the world? Does that apparent serenity mask an inner retreat from life itself? ... Retreat: is this what I've begun?

The next few days would be structured as follows: not counting the time spent sleeping, eating, or taking the short, designated rest that followed our meals, the ten hours devoted daily to meditation were to be spent in periods of sitting and walking meditation. Our instructions were silently to "label" the breath ("rising," "falling") or the walking steps ("lifting," "moving," "placing"). When we noticed that our minds had wandered we were simply to return the attention to the breathing or walking – generally speaking, all other experiences (hearing, feeling, remembering, worrying...) were to be noted and let go.

I cannot easily characterise my early impressions of meditating for long periods. The days, the meditation sessions, and so on, both varied from and resembled one another in

predictable and unaccountable ways. There was, first of all, the considerable effort needed in order to stick with the long periods devoted to meditation. Suffice it to say that the meditative technique required unaccustomed discipline – it could be a terrific challenge simply to continue.

rising falling rising falling rising oh man, when are we going to eat? rising falling rising falling...

It is late in the afternoon. The world outside the meditation room is windless and grey. A car passes.

... hearing falling rising falling rising...

Another.

hearing hearing rising falling rising falling falling...

Somewhere in the building a distant, inconsequential phone rings.

hearing rising *two* rising falling *three* *four* is anyone going to get it? *five* who works here? man, it would be boring to work in this place *six*...

Nothing.

... did somebody get it? nah six rings probably they hung up can't be for me anyway oh man, *when* are going to break for supper? thinking thinking rising falling rising falling rising...

The room is quiet, full of the quiet, impenetrable forms of meditators. Nothing of interest comes into my mind. There's nothing of interest anywhere. A dull pain in my knee. My back is tired and I want to rest it. Sometimes I try to think about the book I've been reading, but the effort takes me nowhere – can't recall why I found it so engaging .

thinking thinking rising falling rising rising falling rising falling

falling rising rising itching
itching thinking...

It's all so mechanical.... Sometimes I wonder if I'm doing this right, but then my worries don't go anywhere. I am waiting, waiting for supper. I am feeling hungry; and I want to get up, stretch my legs, look outside.... Something. Everybody is sitting in the room. They're meditating together and I'm alone, bored. I'm very sleepy and bored but I stay sitting, sitting while time passes. Time doesn't pass; it doesn't move. Nothing happens.

oh, god, something thinking rising falling rising
falling rising falling rising rising
falling this is so boring is something supposed to happen
here? oh yeah: thinking thinking rising
rising falling maybe I should ask Anagarika what to
do maybe she'll think I'm not a good meditator thinking
thinking falling falling rising falling
rising what's he moving for now? noticing hearing
listening listening geez he's restless irritating is
'irritating' a verb? what should I label for that? thinking
thinking rising falling rising falling
rising falling rising rising falling
rising falling oh man this is boring boring rising falling rising
falling falling rising falling
falling falling...

The groan of the door to the dining room below us (the cook opens it when meals are ready). Now I am listening, listening...

oh, I don't believe it that's the door about time!...

A shudder in me as I become a little more alert. Someone next to me moves her arm. She rubs her knee, yawns. A man at the far end of the room is beginning to stretch himself. A little bell goes off in the meditation room.

finally! GREAT! supper...

I slowly move my feet behind me, now, and lower my head down to the floor, face down, to relax my back. I put my arms out ahead of me and have a big stretch. Relief sweeps through me.

I don't believe it's over wooahh that was tough oh

oh this feels great I've done it...

A big yawn, another stretch. I look over at one of my friends. She's stretching.

yeah, we're all cats here...

A little smile. My eyes meet the fellow directly across the room, he smiles. I sit for a moment with my back to the wall, legs out on the floor. Other meditators are beginning to leave. I know I'll be in the dining room soon; no more struggles to wrestle with. Only a faint residue of the heavy sleepiness remains; it's still oozing out of my limbs. My hunger has lost its urgency; it is a patient and satisfying thing, now that food beckons. I look around again. The room itself contains the light movement of people's unhurried departure. The only noises made by the slippered feet on the carpet, a deep breath, a brief whispered greeting. I sit for a little while longer – comfortable now – and notice the relief, the slight stiffness, the glad feeling. A gentle pleasure fills me. A light attention touches these things. A light attention softly falls to my belly – as if by gravity, on its own.

rising falling rising

Sitting with little movement could be uncomfortable, was often accompanied by physical pain, itches that called for immediate attention, and other things: thick bouts of confusion or boredom which hardly seemed to warrant the time-honoured title, "meditation," at all. Yet I was also struck by a deep, smooth calm which on rare occasions emerged, or those moments when my awareness was bright and wonderfully lucid. At such times my breath could become a luminous, living thing: something familiar, of course, but (if it can be said) strangely resounding with interest. And once or twice I found myself being unaccountably intrigued by the most "mundane" things, like the myriad, contiguous sensations of walking and the random sounds emanating from the old building in which we sat. These things were not followed, thinkingly; they sparked lightly in my mind as pure events, and I noticed each one in particular, as if, with gently growing anticipation I were watching over a new life and all of these events of experience were participating in its birth.

No doubt the experience of time altered for me during those days. Like everyone, I am used to its variability, but it was the intensity of difference while in meditation which most struck me. Forty minutes of attention on the rising and falling of the breath could pass like seven, while the very next period could be an ungainly struggle with dull or restless discomfort that stretched these few minutes excruciatingly.

Time stood out in other conspicuous ways, as well. One night I awoke in the middle of the night instantly alert. I had no idea of the time. (Prompted by the naïve conviction that time had no real "place" at a retreat[!] I had deliberately left my watch at home. This presumption had soon been dashed: everything was governed by the clock, it seemed: sitting meditation, walking meditation, meals, bedtime, rest periods.) Deciding to renew the walking meditation, I began to practise the steps in the quiet hallway, but after perhaps twenty minutes of this the sleepiness which had lifted so suddenly began to descend, once more, like a cloud bank. Even so, not wanting to return to bed if the day was about to begin I walked down to the dining room which, I remembered, contained a clock. Eerily quiet now, the room was set up for the following breakfast due in... *five* hours. I went back to sleep.

It's fair to say that I felt most at home with the walking meditation, in the beginning (I was a postman, remember). And it was following an evening walking session early in the retreat, when I had felt exactly "present" to the sensations of moving my feet and placing them, that something of the teacher's alertness was impressed upon me. During my next interview she remarked on how naturally I was learning the walking meditation. Then she noted the precise walking period when she had witnessed this; it coincided exactly with the time that I had noticed my awareness sharpening. I could not fathom how my "interior" state could be available for scrutiny, or what she might have seen, in the steps I was taking.

The early morning meditation has begun again. I am standing in a hallway, a little sleepy, still, so my body sometimes wavers.

standing standing turning turning turning
standing

It is quite dark where I stand. But I've been practising the walking meditation this morning long enough to have witnessed the sunlight first mark the tiles and begin its creeping movement along the hall that intersects the one I am using, at right angles.

I am simply walking up and down this long hallway. There is another meditator here, too. Each of us has his own pace, moving first one way then the other.

lifting moving placing lifting moving placing
lifting...

We have been taught up to seven distinct "steps" to note during the walking, but I find that I cannot manage to watch more than three or four first thing in the morning. Balance is an issue, walking so slowly.

... moving placing lifting moving oh!...

The light suddenly catches me in the face, just as I'm slowly stepping, one foot in the air. It makes a curious impact (light?) and I stumble.

Right away I look over to the other meditator, my face already moving to a little apologetic smile. He's slowly walking in the other direction.... I reason that he would have heard my step falter.... Now something else: I reflect on how quickly this self conscious, social reaction sprang up. I couldn't stop it. My sense of being watched begins to pass.

embarrassing embarrassing standing standing lifting
moving placing lifting moving
placing lifting...

At first, being with the group didn't register very strongly with me. I quickly became familiar, for instance, with the faces and forms of those sitting across from me in the meditation room but since I was so focused on coming to my seat and settling with care I took little note of the meditators immediately to either side. But soon enough this changed. As one part of the routine, just before going to bed the group of us would close up a bit into a circle for a brief period of sharing and to participate in a "loving-kindness" meditation initiated by the teacher. Sometimes she asked individuals a few questions ("Are you finding it as difficult to stay with your breath this evening, Jason?"), or made reference, with permission, to some event or other, some "experience" a meditator had had: patience with an afternoon's struggle, sudden emotional relief, a long-forgotten and timely memory. These events would often serve to illustrate some concrete point touching on our practice. But in this way, familiarity and even some curiosity with regards to my fellow-meditators did naturally begin to arise. Admittedly, it took somewhat longer to notice the habitual dimensions of self-consciousness I carried with me.

However, it deserves stressing that silence was the (somewhat relaxed) rule during my introduction to this environment. Aside from the instructions given to the group or individuals, the "interviews" each of us had with the teacher, and the occasional words whispered during meals, this late evening period was the only time in which the retreat's silence was set aside. I sometimes felt a sense of relief when our silence was lifted.

What I noticed was the occasional welling up of an impatient need to speak: to receive confirmation, to make a clever remark – something to ease the inner pressure of keeping silent. Not that the silence was a constant burden, for, even though living in close proximity to people unknown to me I was relieved (as were they) of any social need to speak politely, "break the ice" or be funny; I didn't need to sound interested or well-informed; the daily social requirement that I fill time and audible space with a suitable response or well-turned phrase was formally absent here. In a sense, silence put my speaking (and that of others) into view and gave me ease in a way I would not have expected. In addition to being "kept," therefore, it was often quite effortless. Even the initial awkward spaces, in which glances were caught and fumbled, soon enough gave way to mutual acquiescence to the rule of silence. Once more, I am reminded of my late-night search for the "time." After finding the clock in the dining room I had soon enough returned to the familiarity of my room – the eery, lonely silence of the darkened building was of a different order from the participatory silence of the group.

Meals seemed to be a region of space somewhat between meditation and "real life." Silence was supposed to continue, but the inevitable traffic around the coffee pot required whispers ("milk?") and gestures which could evolve into quiet chats ("You doin' okay?" "I didn't bother you with my coughing, I hope... did I?"), and sometimes the last semblance of "meditative solemnity" could be utterly dispelled by a mouthful of salad (CRUNCH, CR-unch, crunch) or while gazing with admiration at some favourite dish. Faces could be an open discourse – a smile, a glance returned, bright eyes finding the humour in some small moment. The silence of other meditators (that is, any of us some of the time) could be more earnest, perhaps in the face of some struggle or preoccupation which resisted the diversion of a meal or which (as it were) possessed insufficient "levity" to remain upstairs on the sitting cushions.

At times the deliberate absence of something so "natural" in daily life as chatting at mealtimes could generate an electric tension in the room – rather like I felt in childhood, for instance, when as a supper guest I was required to keep very still for someone's father or mother to "say Grace."

At lunch, one day, beginning with some brief words shared in hushed tones there gradually emerges a full swell of conversation and laughter.

> I was sure I'd burst this morning when you looked at me! ...
>
> Can you believe this pie? I never eat like this at home! ...

Oh, I felt like such a goof when I first learned the walking meditation!

The damn has burst and the words spill out eagerly. After so much quiet it offers a kind of relief to engage in light banter. Then, the teacher's voice is suddenly heard above it all:

This is careless speech!

If it persists it may be some time before mindfulness is regained. You are disturbing the effort you've put into your practice.

There's endless time for talking in daily life. Ask yourself what prompts you to this now.

Her words jar me with their directness. Like a reproached child, awkward and unsettled, I need to collect myself (fortunately for my self-esteem everyone else is also involved!).

... But then, quite quickly the whole tone of the room begins to alter: our silence resumes anew, now set starkly against the recent joviality. And the nervous energy of our earlier silence has been discharged.... In the instant these differences reach me something like amazement rises in my throat, as if I am being lifted by the silence. I'm vividly aware of being part of this silence, which is deep, relaxed, sonorous.

And the silence offered up another dimension of the group's presence: the meditators with whom I sat in the room and who slowly walked past me in the hallways could alternately become my exemplars or irritants. While engaged in stifling discomfort sometimes I would look out to the room and notice another person's steady posture, and begin to feel my thoughts settle or my spine become a little more erect. Conversely, periods of hard-won clarity were at times eroded by the nagging distraction of someone's dry cough or seeming inability to settle. I was not always sensitive or susceptible to this influence, but either effect was accomplished wordlessly. Reflecting, a bit, I then realised that I most likely acted in this manner for others as well. An example: there was a standing lamp next to my place in the meditation room, and the teacher asked me, on the first night, whether I could please remember to turn it on when we all rose from sitting to begin walking. But such was the intense variability of my meditation experience – restlessness, ease, cloudiness, clarity and so on – that even in the beginning (and in spite of the evident need for the light!) I was simply unable to attend to this minor task with any consistency. These lapses were not mentioned but when they did intermittently come to mind I suffered from stinging embarrassment, and hoped (without much conviction) that nobody "minded."

What of the pedagogy I experienced? The episode at the dinner table is suggestive, if incomplete. Sometimes I would notice Anagarika glancing around the room during

meals. In itself her gaze seemed free of the need for recognition; it was not hasty or indifferent in its appraisal, and bore a natural sort of interest. Whether her eyes rested lightly or intently on people she seemed to look, so to speak, for you rather than at you. The late-night sessions were also revealing of the forms of attention she expressed.

Not infrequently a person is caught in considerable emotion recalling an incident. The welling up of eyes and moments of discomposure, during these evening exchanges, are fairly commonplace. You can see the teacher's eyes soften, at such times, her voice becoming full of care – but alert, too, and discerning:

> Now, I want you to think back, a little. Will you?
>
> When did you notice this sadness? This could be important....

Or,

> Thank you so much for sharing this with us. It hasn't been easy for you today, I don't think, has it?

And then (her voice a little fuller), to everyone:

> Can you see how well he has done? this is fine practice... not easy, of course.... No: it's taken courage, hasn't it?
>
> But you see, if we apply our energies to developing mindfulness there will be times when clarity like this blossoms....
>
> You see, sometimes with all the effort we need for this – all the discipline of this practice – we may not be so mindful of our hearts. But the heart plays a great role in our practice.
>
> Loving-kindness... we practice this at night, but notice how important it is, at all times.
>
> We must try not to forget this.

Silence, again, in the room. After listening so closely, leaning slightly forward, I relax and breathe in deeply, feeling content.

Another thing I noticed was a reflexive regard. The reports by others, or by the teacher, could reveal startling leaps of understanding, "insights," which left me struck... but with what? Often with appreciation, sometimes with uncertainty, and at other times with a shrinking sense of inadequacy, or, on occasion, envy: "she must really be an experienced meditator," or, "I don't think he walks as well as I do," or, "why doesn't anything happen to me?"

Am I doing things wrong? or worse: are the depths being reported in others simply not present in me? This last possibility, especially, troubles me. I finally take these questions to the teacher.

Try not to let it bother you.

You see, things arise for meditators when they're ready – fruit ripens in its own time, in this practice. But everything's actually like this. Don't you think?

Has she heard these worries before? I begin to doubt that they are unique.

Besides, do *you* know what you most need to know? We'd all *like* to have things answered, but the things that move within us often work independently of our wishes.

Perhaps the results you see others getting aren't what you need. I know that it's natural to compare ourselves with others, but it's seldom very helpful.

Don't worry... these things are worth waiting for, they're worth the effort. Patience can be difficult, I know, but it's very important. And, you see, as strange as it sounds, the absence of goals is also crucial in meditation. With patience one achieves goals they don't expect – something like that. It's not really so complicated....

... Now, tell me, how is your walking meditation going? Can you show me these steps?... Okay, good....

And so we move on to other things. I leave the interview feeling myself again and return to the walking – "raising... lifting... moving... touching... placing." The movements arise without the confusing haste which had marked them recently, and an ease finds its way once more into my walking steps. The problem of making progress diminishes (for the moment), as I watch the modest sensations of this steady, curiously aimless movement along the tiled hallway.

By now it will be clear that these interviews offered a crucial counterpoint to meditation, especially when struggles seemed to overwhelm. There were periods – sometimes I didn't really notice them for five or ten minutes – when my mind simply wandered off. There might be the heavy urge to sleep, simmering impatience with the inertia of sitting or the monotonous walking movements, and those insinuating worries about my suitability to meditation and the value of it all.

This afternoon, I am exhausted of the goodwill or hope to continue. It may be that only a stubborn variety of conceit sustains me (I must not *let on how I'm doing). I am not bored or drowsy, notice, but thoroughly disheartened: chafed raw against the limits of a tenuous inner civility of whose very existence in my life I have been – until now – almost completely ignorant.... (Yes, I'm hungry for understanding – but not* this. *Not* NOW.)

Even the sun's rays from the opposite window are uncomfortable and unwelcome. A shadow cools my cheek and... does not pass. I open my eyes.

Anagarika is standing there watching. Then she quietly motions to come for an interview. We don't smile. I am near the frayed edge of something I do not understand. Movement takes great composure and absorbs me, but brings some relief.

At first, I am not eager to speak directly of these things. It is a reluctant, confounded sort of reticence: as though my words were vainly reaching for experiences which memory itself feared to touch. As my halting responses slowly gain voice, her patient gaze does not falter; she is "following" me. None of the things I say appear to test her attentiveness or regard. Her questions, when they begin, both affirm and probe or jostle me:

> ... Good. Now when did this despair begin, would you say? or, is "despair" adequate for what you've been experiencing? It would be good if you could try to describe this carefully. Take whatever time you need. I have nowhere to go.
>
> Did it only begin to emerge during the sitting? Describe your last walking session for me, can you?...

My mood gradually lifts in response to such understanding and scrupulous care. I had been beginning to feel like a failure because the practice hadn't been "working," but now find these events being somehow enlivened with interest. Finally she says,

> Please don't let these doubts about your practice concern you too much. Everyone has periods of meditation like this.
>
> ... You see, mind is not always energetic and it sometimes strains against the sort of discipline that meditation requires – now you know how uncomfortable this can be!
>
> It's important to persist, but for this we need to be kind to ourselves: disciplined but gentle. And you should know that great insight can emerge from within the darkest moments. Take heart. You're doing well.

I am reminded to note these experiences with a label: "frustrating," "paining," for instance.

> Remember, mindfulness can be applied to any experience. Now when you sit try to note even when things like boredom or self doubts arise, whatever it is....

As our talk comes to a close she makes a remark that stays with me for a long time:

> You will discover that mindfulness has a great power of its own. There is a reason for this – nothing can withstand being reduced to a verb.

I return to the sitting room, eager to resume my sitting and warmed with appreciation. From time to time I recall her last words, gaining confidence from their compact force.

We had our final conversation not long before the close of the retreat; I was brimming over with eager questions. We spoke of many things. But in the midst of our talk I asked about something I'd been doing recently during meditation. I considered it a minor alteration to the meditative technique, which I had added to my practice the day before: It was that when the breath was very still, while in sitting meditation, my heartbeat had seemed to "distract" the attention and I had begun trying to breathe in coordination with my heart's rhythm. I brought it to her attention, at that time, because of a sharp discomfort I had recently begun to notice: an infrequent, sharp pain in my chest. She seemed to know what I meant before the words were out of my mouth, and proceeded to chide me gently for not following the instructions as they had been given. "The pain will continue for three days," she said (accurately, it turned out), "after that it will disappear."

Now, what happened for me in the wake of these things was momentous. Sitting back on my little cushion in the meditation room, I was suddenly struck by the subtlety of what she had just told me, for, observing things I had never seen with an inner delicacy I had never exercised, I had reached a place in my experience... and found – how else to put this? – someone there, waiting. In its wholeness this recognition also contained a sense of knowing, which filled me swiftly and with force: I had met a true "teacher."... Perhaps I should relate something else, as well: during this final conversation, I raised several "life questions" that I had found the courage to ask. In the midst of them she made an oblique remark which, most likely for its evident incongruity as much as its suddenness, left me reverberating like a soundly struck bell. Quietly and with no elaboration she observed, "Perhaps one day you will do what I do."...

As the scheduled time for departure approaches everyone in the group comes together one last time, to reflect a little on the retreat and say some words of thanks. My heart feels enlarged, generously filled by impressions of this time: of a sudden fondness for my small sitting area and the kindness of people's silent gestures, of the teacher....

People begin speaking of their experiences: one with welcome humour, another with a simple, moving eloquence, yet another struggles for each charged word.... Now I begin to feel unsettled by a panic of doubt: what to say? There's so much.

When a meditator wonders in jest how Anagarika can have "put up with us" I pipe in quite spontaneously: "It's a privilege." ... Immediately, I'm taken aback by my words, surprised by the suddenness with which this conviction has formed, hoping(!), now, that it has not sounded unappreciative.... The teacher turns to me, "You're right."

Most likely it is inevitable for one to observe, here, that words are difficult to find for any of this, that they fail to "do justice," and so on. Certainly, I know that I became impressed by what a fine thing it is to be able to share with, and nourish in others something of great worth. And the fact that what this great teacher did is a privilege, continues to touch me even now, many years after her death; yet my regard for what she did develops, too, such that what it means to do it seems a distant thing, still. But note that the pedagogy of this environment cannot be separated from the forms of discipline and modes of attention it drew from us, and encouraged. That is, I do not wish to suggest that these concluding experiences were culminations, if this leads to an effacement of the periods of boredom and confusion and contentment that were somehow present, gathered, in them. Can it be that the richness of even the simplest experiences – sitting, lifting a foot, breathing, swallowing, silence – constitute meanings which will forever exceed my comprehension? Perhaps, but if I listen closely I can oftentimes still recall the familiar textures of that room, the odours of the next meal, the settling bodies, the sighs; I can listen still as the sounds of a passing car vanish, and feel the cool relief of the final bell....

4

A PHENOMENOLOGY OF WONDER*

Not long ago, I was moved to recall an event now long passed: On a damp Sunday afternoon I am sitting contentedly reading a novel. It is a fine book, and rather long. At the end of each chapter, or sometimes when a sentence ends at the bottom of the page, I pause a little and let the things of the room address me. During one such interlude, I reflect on how evenly the undisturbed mood of the day is matched by the book's prose, like the tranquil merging of two streams.... But then, right at the top of the next page I stumble, caught by the sudden angularity of the text – *what was that*? Standing within the narrative – protruding from it, really – is a fragment of Heraclitus in which he says something about stepping into a river. The orderly strains of Bach, the kettle in the kitchen, the cat beside me have receded from my attention: "One cannot step twice into the same river." By way of explanation a short Greek phrase, with translation, has been woven into the story: *"panta rhei*, 'everything flows.'" The words hang together, suspended just beyond my grasp. I feel intrigued and begin to find a way through my slight confusion.... "What's that?" "Do you want some *tea*?" my wife asks again. "Oh... sure. I'll come."

My hands warm around the cup. Blowing into the clear, dark tea little waves ripple across the surface, warming and moistening my nose and eyes. When I stop, the surface becomes still: a tiny pond. Gazing into the liquid, I begin to wonder again about rivers. Heraclitus' words wend their serpentine way back to me from the book on my lap, drawn by my wondering. Somehow the expression is very *new* to me, although the experience of moving water is not – after all, hadn't I spent my childhood only a stone's throw from a river? I blow into my tea and watch the nimble surface become still once more....

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* An earlier version of this chapter appears as "The Face of Wonder," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 28, no. 4 (July-August 1996): 437-62.

"Jump!" my brothers call to me, encouragingly. I'm standing on the black steel bridge looking over the river, a tremendous height above the green waters. Standing on the bridge looking down, I can feel the river's sweeping presence behind my back, pushing the water to the exact line under my feet – the straight edge of the bridge stretching from bank to bank – where the river really begins in this moment. From this line the current moves steadily onwards, tugging me. The river never pauses like I do now: it never sleeps, or returns home; its steady streaming never tires. I feel urged on by the unrelenting flow beneath me; the steel girder under my feet grows tense and somehow less steady. A conspiracy of anticipation fills and stretches the taut moment. Is it the bridge that betrays me, that nudges me, finally, into the dizzying pull?... The sudden fall.... *Splash!* ....The deep, disorienting plunge....

All of a sudden it hits me: *Oh... of course! Where* is the "river"? It just keeps going, on and on. How can the river *ever* be the *same*? Knowing and uncertainty sweep through me with equal vigour.

Panta rhei. How can I convey the explosion of meaning and questioning this phrase caused in me? It rapidly called to mind the surging dynamics of water pushing past my body; it compelled me to look at the perplexing relationship between this word *river* and what I knew observed, and swam in; it propelled me into new ways of seeing that which I experienced and assumed. While caught in its force everything became permeated, saturated, with the implications of *process* and *flow*: from atoms to apples, buildings to breezes, songs to snakes. I was surprised, delighted, bewildered, and for a few moments – and at the heart of it all – in wonder. Does one ever entirely recover from this kind of thing?

What *is* wonder?

Who among us does not pause from time to time to consider the manner in which we live, the meaning and significance of things around us, or the texture of our relations with others? In such moments, are we not on occasion inexplicably struck with a startling new way of seeing things? Or, does it never happen while we are doing nothing in particular that the continuous, inured fabric of experience suddenly *snags*? Is this wonder? Allow me to begin this tentative approach to the phenomenon of wonder while still a discrete distance from it, by introducing some characteristics of a fictional man. Italo Calvino has written of a man who is given to observing the world of objects and his experience in an uncommonly meticulous fashion. His name is Mr. Palomar.

> A bit nearsighted, absent-minded, introverted, he does not seem to belong temperamentally to that human type generally called an observer. And yet it has always happened that certain things – a stone wall, a seashell, a leaf, a teapot – present themselves to him as if asking him for minute and prolonged attention.[1]

Everything which falls under his gaze is scrutinised with something of the air of a medieval scholastic. No phenomenon in the natural or social world is neglected out of hand: from the arrangement of stars in the night sky to the cheeses displayed in a shop, from the awkward quality of our relations with the young to the very nature of death. Whatever the subject, Mr. Palomar applies to it a fastidious attention:

> Mr. Palomar sees a wave rise in the distance, grow, approach, change form and color, fold over itself, break, vanish, and flow again. At this point he could convince himself that he has concluded the operation he had set out to achieve, and he could go away. But isolating one wave is not easy, separating it from the wave immediately following, which seems to push it and at times overtakes it and sweeps it away; and it is no easier to separate that one wave from the preceding wave, which seems to drag it toward the shore.[2]

It seems inevitable that each of the phenomena he observes presents to him certain innate difficulties, some of which are surprising. Mr. Palomar is not a man who expects immediate success, though, and he is capable of ingenious response, as when he mentally describes a square zone of the sea in which to catalogue all wave activity within a given time. There is a precision, a logical tidiness, in this method which is fitting, for he has postulated that one might discover in the nature of waves the "key to mastering the world's complexity by reducing it to its simplest mechanism."[3] It is a possibility which holds enormous appeal for this man.[4] Yet when applied to this square section of the sea, does his method of observation yield the understanding he seeks?

> Concentrating the attention on one aspect makes it leap into the foreground and occupy the square, just as, with certain drawings, you have only to close your eyes and when you open them the perspective has changed. Now, in the overlapping of crests moving in various directions, the general pattern seems broken down into sections that rise and vanish. In addition, the reflux of every wave also has power of its own that hinders the oncoming waves. And if you concentrate your attention on these backward thrusts, it seems that the true movement is the one that begins from the shore and goes out to sea.[5]

Worse still, the complications do not stop at this unexpected development, as he notices that the shape of the shore line, the tide, the wind speed, and innumerable other conditions come to bear upon his painstaking observations. Despite his persistence, the sheer detail and complexity of the phenomena Mr. Palomar is determined to understand

seemingly admit his attention only to rebuff him, one by one. It is as if a man or woman who would swim were time and again cast back upon the arid shore.

At times we may find ourselves amused in our anticipation of the futility of such impeccable vigilance. It is not that we wish to find fault with Mr. Palomar. To do so would be unfair and perhaps a little unkind – after all, the dedication alone with which he applies his attention to these things is a remarkable achievement: confronted with objects or phenomena that merit further understanding he redirects his attention, he continually *disposes* himself, in their direction. This requires effort and persistence, since one must always be willing to leave behind what is routine. (Indeed, for so fastidious a man there is a charming audacity to his ambitions.) But the fruit of his attention is merely reformulated perplexity and renewed frustration; for this reason, in fact, it may be true that this futility elicits a faint sadness in us. Do we find ourselves empathising with this curious figure – might there be a sadness for ourselves, on occasion? (After all, perhaps Mr. Palomar is not so unlike us.) More than this, we may become unsettled as we face the fact that he perpetually arrives at this state for *good reason*: " 'It is only when you have come to know the surface of things,' he concludes, 'that you can venture to seek what is underneath. But the surface of things is inexhaustible.' "[6]

It might be said that Mr. Palomar is a man of our age, who takes the situation of his life seriously. He seems to be a man directed by a restless concern to understand and organise the world sufficiently to protect himself from the inexplicable. The world is for him a place brimming with problems, intense curiosities and puzzles, but with no mystery. For all his meticulous attention, Mr. Palomar represents a person who stands aloof from wonder. On this point I should be more precise: Mr. Palomar is given to careful thought and even to wondering but does not once find himself struck by or immersed in *wonder*.

'Nothing ever happens': *It's no wonder*

A man sits looking at the television, flipping channels. (There's *nothing on*.) Very slowly, the afternoon has become laden with a flat, lifeless duration, to which everything about him conforms. His heavy indifference is confirmed unendingly: now, by the painting on the wall, purchased only last month – where has all the *colour* gone? Lifting himself from the couch he wanders away to another room. At a window he gazes out somewhere into the middle distance, blankly facing the people and parkland below. "Feel like going anywhere?" his wife asks. "I don't know. Not really."

Later in the day, not far away – perhaps in another apartment along the same street – a woman is on the phone with her sister. They don't usually talk so long, but tonight their conversation has taken a reflective turn. The woman pauses before answering the question her sister has posed; at last she says, "Oh, I don't know, nothing ever *changes* in my life. It's just the same thing, from one week to the next – we never seem to do anything. ... Sometimes I worry that one day I'll die and it really won't even *matter*." The suddenness of this bitter lament, the deep sadness welling up in her throat, surprise her: such regret! She feels empty, as if something were lost or forever beyond her grasp.

A world without wonder is bereft of possibility. Sometimes even the taken-for-granted quality of things can be missing. Things sit mutely in the shadows of time and space, where they *merely* exist (or do they?). Our "disinterest" is a felt distance from and absence of another.[7] People and things make no difference to us and so we are indifferent to them. Under a pervasive attitude of indifference things are not different from each other and so do not offer themselves to us for engagement. We have no relation to them and they have none with us or each other. Everything is separate but nothing is distinct ("in its own right"). Things have lost their meaning and are situated a great distance from us. We are apart from everything. In a world without wonder there is nothing to enter into relations with; because the world is mute, colourless and inanimate we lack the means for really living in it, with it. We are implicated in – stuck and pressed into – a deepening wonder-lessness and, so we say, become *depressed*.

The tenor of the wonderless is not always so deep as this. When we "make do" or cope we are able to act steadily in (without sinking into) the sameness of things. Our lives are predictable; we move along a set route, in a routine. Things must move along in a manner which enables us to function, but anything unusual, "out of the ordinary," or unpredicted, jars us. We are not so removed from the world that things mean nothing, yet we do expect them to mean something – indeed, something quite specific and confined. They have no "life of their own": rather, we know where things belong, what they are called, and expect them to "stay put." Is it conceivable that life begins to seem meaningless on occasion because the things of our life have only the meaning we have given them, and the meaning of our life only the function we perform with these things?

In this recurrent, *in-consequential*, manner of living something stands out only when propelled by extraordinary circumstances: birth, death, urgent despair, compelling chagrin, unexpected joy... a walk in a park:

Betty:[8] A couple of years ago I was having trouble with depression. One day when I was walking alone in the park, for a brief period all of my interior monologue just stopped... a moment of the most beautiful stillness. All of a sudden I felt close to everything: the park, the birds, the light, the air. I can't think of anything that led up to this experience, but there was such a wonderful release to it. I suddenly felt like a part of life instead of an observer.

Do we recognise wonder in this experience? The word "wonder" is used in a rich variety of contexts. In this chapter I am focussing upon the experience of wonder itself, that is, on the experience which corresponds grammatically to its substantive usage. While reference is sometimes made to the experience of "beginning to wonder," or of "wondering" (that is, its verbal form), my main concern here is with the "state" or experience – the phenomenon – of *wonder*. Among the many examples used to reveal the meanings of the noun "wonder" in the *Oxford English Dictionary* is the following brief passage dating from the sixteenth century: "Then he turning about, and beholding him... with wonder stayed a while without any word."[9] As oblique as this reference is it does express a common aspect of wonder: that it is unbidden, or not fully anticipated. Also, it is worth pausing to note that language is silent in the face of wonder: we stand speechless before it. When the word "wonder" is employed here, therefore, it reverberates with the following definition:

> The emotion caused by the perception of something novel and unexpected, or inexplicable; astonishment mingled with perplexity or bewildered curiosity. Also, the state of mind in which this emotion exists.[10]

Mr. Palomar may be said "to wonder" a great deal but never to be caught by the experience of "wonder" itself. My questions about the relations between the phenomenon "river" and the word 'river' reflect a process of *wondering* that emerged from the earlier moment of mere *wonder*, which in turn began with still earlier *wondering*. Is this confusing? If speaking of "wonder" is elusive, it is likely due in part to the wide variation of our use of the verb "to wonder":[11]

> "Have you ever wondered how cats can sleep so much?"
>
> "Where's the joy in my life gone? I've wondered about this a lot lately."
>
> "Me? Oh, just wondering if I should try the cheesecake."
>
> "Do you ever wonder if you'd have been better off marrying Jane?"
>
> "I've sometimes spent hours looking into the night sky, wondering about where we belong in all of this."
>
> "I wonder if you'd just mind your own business for a change!"

"I've been wondering, what makes Jennifer such a great person to be around?"

"As for me, I never let myself wonder about that stuff – it just gets me depressed."

"She's really clear about things now. You'll never catch *her* wondering about the 'meaning of life'!"

"Physicists have been wondering about the fundamental characteristics of gravity for years but still haven't solved this mystery."

"After seeing the look on his face when I told him, I had to wonder how I ever got into this whole mess."

"It was when I learned their little girl had cancer that I seriously began to wonder if God cares."

"You've really got to wonder how he can eat so much and stay slim."

"Instead of sitting around wondering about stuff all the time, why don't you start *doing* something with yourself?"

"Say... Honey? – I wonder if you can give me a hand with this ladder?"

"Not *one* promotion in all this time – who's to wonder that she finally left?"

"I wonder if I should bring my umbrella today?"

While it is true that wondering may resonate with that about which wonder has arisen, wondering is a manner of thinking; it involves language. Wonder is passive, wondering active. "To wonder" is to be engaged in the current of familiar, named experience. When "wonder" moves or strikes us though – when, as we say, we are *wonder-struck* – words escape us. We may stroll along wondering to ourselves or to another about something, whether trivial or profound, but when wonder emerges we stop – silent and still. "Wonder is situated in the middle of movement," observes Cornelis Verhoeven.[12] It is a gap in language and thought. Our breath is caught – we are "aghast" – in wonder; perhaps our mouth drops; our eyes open wide, eyebrows raised; wonder brings us to a standstill.[13] In moments of wonder we find ourselves at "wit's end" (or do we in these moments *lose* ourselves?).

So wondering may bear no conceivable relation to the experience of wonder, as when we "wonder" about which sweater to put on. Similarly, wonder may arise in some moment when we are not wondering – say, while fully occupied with preparing lunch. Wondering neither always precedes nor proceeds from wonder. Then too, their relation can be quite intimate, for wonder may unexpectedly arise out of a process of wondering, and likewise, an extended period of wondering may be stimulated by an initial moment of intense wonder.[14] Verhoeven speaks of wondering as the *ritardando*, the deliberate, gradual slowing down of the expansive and exhilarating pace of wonder.[15] Regardless of

the case we choose to consider, though, the critical distinction between "to wonder" and "wonder" stands.

Although less firm, one other distinction can be made here. This journey may be said to tread upon a "middle path" of sorts: between the commonplace and the miraculous. It would appear obvious that the former simply does not strike us, by virtue of the fact that it is ordinary and expected ("It's no wonder that..."); however, the sense of the latter, as being "beyond the agency of natural laws," falls outside our province for a different reason. While wishing neither to deny nor argue for the possibility of "wonders" of this variety suffice it to say that I am presently more interested to explore the dimensions of the experience of wonder in daily living. It is always possible to look to religious literature, from Hindu epic poetry to the prose of German mystics, to read of great miracles and wonders, but my focus here is more modest, more pedestrian: it is to speak of something which can erupt out of even the most meandering and mundane passage through life. However, this "middle path" may be said to be of a dialectical nature, and so who is to say that on occasion we might not come to consider things in daily life as "wondrous," and thus to look with new eyes upon, or see the wonder in, the "ordinary"? In "Miracle Fair" the Polish poet Wislawa Szymborska achieves a keen sense of these moments:

> The commonplace miracle:
> that so many common miracles take place.
>
> The usual miracle:
> invisible dogs barking
> in the dead of the night.
>
> One of many miracles:
> a small and airy cloud
> is able to upstage the massive moon.
>
> Several miracles in one:
> an alder is reflected in the water
> and is reversed from left to right
> and grows from crown to root
> and never hits bottom
> though the water isn't deep.
>
> A run of the mill miracle:
> winds mild to moderate
> turning gusty in storms.
>
> A miracle in the first place:
> cows will be cows.
>
> Next but not least:

just this cherry orchard
from just this cherry pit.
A miracle minus top hat and tails:
fluttering white doves.

A miracle (what else can you call it):
the sun rose today at three fourteen a.m.
and will set tonight at one past eight.

A miracle that's lost on us:
the hand actually has fewer than six fingers
but still it's got more than four.

A miracle, just take a look around:
the inescapable earth.

An extra miracle, extra and ordinary:
the unthinkable
can be thought.[16]

Where's the wonder in it?

A young boy moves down the densely wooded slope towards the river. As he follows this familiar trail along the bank he happily breathes in the rich air, still redolent of last night's rainfall. The morning's light finds its way to him through the dripping tree tops, here and there revealing the shining faces of exposed rocks and a glistening spider's web, upon which tiny drops of water cling.

In this light the world is only half awake, for all the light seems concentrated on a few prominent things in the wood, which stand out sharply and luminously against deep shadows where the night has not yet been dispelled. The birds are especially busy above him this morning as he picks his way downwards, and the river's lazy current grows a little more audible now – briefly drawing his attention.... A flicker of colour... *shshsh*... What's that? His opened mouth suddenly draws a short breath. His heart jumps as he sees it. (Snake!) In a frozen instant it crosses his path a short distance ahead. The youngster stands fast, excited to the very edge of belief. His eyes follow its quick course into the wild grass. For a few seconds the creature's improbable body darts in and out of the light and before the boy knows it the snake has soundlessly disappeared.

> "A *snake*!" "What... what was it doing?" "What if it *bit* me?" "Where does he live?" "Snakes are so fast!"...

And then, following a deep pause his focus recedes and softens; another question emerges:

> "How does he... *move*?"

Many of us have had an experience of this sort: alone in some lovely spot which nourishes our senses. Sometimes it seems easy to be drawn out of our normal preoccupations and simply to watch and enjoy the sights and smells around us. The world calls and on such occasions we hear it. Even if we are not personally reminded, here, of the careful placement of young feet on sloping ground, the smell of moss, or the startling first sight of a little snake, perhaps another experience of serene beauty or happy interest comes to mind. These are first encounters with things in the world, or, things encountered in some new way for the very first time.

For the child, we may say, there is so much new to see; so little has yet been handled or tasted or named. For the child such experiences are natural and necessary. We even expect it of them – "Look Suzan! What's *that*?" A young girl or boy may not have a name for "that" as yet; we, however, more than likely do. At times, perhaps we are even too ready to affix names to objects or phenomena which we experience.[17] It is possible to make mistakes, of course, but I'm thinking just now of the possibility of naming something prematurely – in the wrong *way* – before the experience has been perceived as fully as it might be.

Clearly the matter of language is germane. For example, what do we call the boy's experience with the snake? Being sensitive to the distinction between wonder and wondering we can suggest that the questions of the boy following his encounter are some manner of wondering. But what of the initial experience? Is it surprise? amazement? astonishment, perhaps?[18] Is there a brief element of shock or fright initially present? Quite likely. Perhaps an exhilaration, as well, at the possibility of the snake veering (but not too closely!) towards him? Later, he doesn't seem bewildered by the experience, but might we say he is somewhat perplexed by, or curious about it?[19] And finally, what urges the boy to ask how the snake moves? Do we find wonder in any of this?

Part of our difficulty in discerning where the wonder is to be "found" here can be attributed to the fact that snakes mean so *much* to us: at the very least they frighten, delight, horrify and intrigue us. But to varying degrees this ambivalence can also be found wherever we come face to face with things never before seen, or seen for the first time in *this* way. Everything we are stands exposed before some unknown.

Is it possible that there have ever been humans unmoved by – men, women, children who have not been awestruck, confounded, or driven to panic by – the snake? Sometimes, too, people have honoured them. For instance, during his travels Mr. Palomar

hears that to the ancient Toltecs the snake symbolised the continuity of life.[20] Many cultures have similar traditions. In India, where it is known as the *nāga*, the snake has long been associated with wisdom. Indeed, the renowned second century Buddhist philosopher Nāgārjuna acquired his own extraordinary gifts, legend offers, during a journey to the mysterious ocean realm of the great *nāga* king.[21] While there he received particular insights which had been guarded unwaveringly since the time of the Buddha, lying dormant for centuries until one of sufficient intelligence arose to claim them. Nāgārjuna, whose dialectical reduction of reified views forces us to look continually anew upon the animate process of living – all this wisdom, the generous gift of a snake to a man. Surely among the host of emotions and thoughts we have towards these creatures there must be some wonder?

At the tail end of the day, now, as bed time arrives his father, book in hand, begins to settle our boy into bed and ready him for a favourite story. The mood grows quiet in the room and they turn to the book. It is a fine way to end the day.

This book contains a gentle, good humoured tale which soon begins to draw them into its weaving narrative. There is no need to hurry tonight, and anyway, a story like this cannot be read in a single evening.... Only at long last does the man place the marker at a chapter's end.

As he puts the book aside, though, he looks up to see his son curiously less sleepy, more thoughtful, than he had expected at the end of so lengthy a reading. What is more, the child's face reflects an alert mood that somehow belies the recent events of the tale. Several moments pass before the boy's mouth opens and he turns to look at his father.

He asks a single question, one he'd forgotten until now during the busy day:

"Daddy, how do snakes move?"

How does one respond to such a question? For one familiar with or well studied in natural phenomena the question of a snake's manner of locomotion is explained without much difficulty. For most purposes this question can be factually answered with reference to the shivering coordination of its scales, or its flexible spine. No kinetic laws are suspended by its movement along a stretch of ground or a branch – however fluid it may *appear*. (Do we sense Mr. Palomar drawing near, adjusting his glasses?) From a certain perspective, even to call it "remarkable" is little more than to acquiesce to a bipedal or anthropocentric bias. And perhaps we may be moved to observe (in the pique which descends upon most adults on occasion) that the questions of children often re-

flect a naïve and almost willful amazement at things easily explained.... But can this really be the end of it?

The answer begins:

> "It has to do with how they move their skin."
>
> "Skin?" the boy considers this for a second, "but how?"
>
> "Well, you see, it sort of ripples along the ground bit by bit, like little waves, and this motion pushes them forward."

The boy touches the skin on his arm. This isn't making sense. His snake, the one he has seen, didn't moved like that at all; it had just glided along, gracefully twisting.

> "How can *skin* do that, Daddy? The snake by the river is really fast. You... you should *see* him!"

With this his father recognises more strongly, now, the appeal in his son's eyes. And he suddenly remembers being struck himself by the sight of snakes as a youngster – for that matter, even that large one last year – and a distant awe for their effortless, silken movement reawakens in him. (They *are* quite wonderful, when you think about it.)

> "You know, Michael, every time I see a snake I'm amazed, too. It just doesn't seem possible, does it?"

His son eagerly agrees. Both are quiet for a moment, and then the man adds,

> "It's kind of beautiful, really; do you suppose snakes move like that because they're happy just to be so close to everything?"

The boy is silent ("*yes... that would make sense*") and then looks appreciatively to his father; for a little longer the two of them quietly wonder to one another about these fascinating creatures.

Where is the wonder in this story? It is important that we be clear about this. As we leave them now, the child and his father are *wondering* about snakes.[22] The question of snakes' movement has turned into a manner of wondering, of delicate, even loving, consideration. The father has, with some encouragement, been able to respond to or empathise with his son's call because he can recall something of his own experience. The young boy's present wondering has arisen out of his initial experience during his morning adventure. We have seen that this experience was unavoidably complex and rich. Astonishment, surprise, fright were all most likely present. It is in the very openness of his encounter, though, in that sudden open-faced gasp, the stock-still exhilaration, that we have witnessed this child in *wonder*. Then, in one of his questions ("How

does he... *move?*") we already observe him slipping into a current of wondering. The boy's wondering bears the impression of the wonder in the softness of his curiosity; all the same, in his wondering he does emerge again from wonder, back into his thoughts and names and all the rest.

Is it plausible to say that the response sought by the boy's wondering must be such that the wonder which enlivens the wondering is not dismissed, "explained away"? While it is true that the father might instead have articulated a more "informative" answer, it is important to note that the response he gives in no way precludes further inquiry – quite the opposite. In a crucial sense, if the resonant wonder is not kept fully "intact" there is no longer even a question to answer. This would seem to make of wonder a very delicate thing, something vulnerable to an insensitive grasp. It is so easy to attend to the words, the questioning and answering, and yet to miss the open, elusive and radically ineffable moments of wonder itself. Undoubtedly a good deal of the required delicacy is owing to the youth and innocence of our questioner, who in the end elicits his father's most gentle nature and touch. Certainly; but might wonder of itself also call for special regard of this sort?

It has been said that our specialised branches of knowledge each derives from familiar, commonplace origins: chemistry from cooking, mathematics from carpentry, and philosophy from the questions of children.[23] Now it may be true that (with the possible exception of Nāgārjuna) questions concerning snakes have never engaged the attention of philosophers. Yet our central concern is, of course, not with snakes but with wonder.

To this point in our gradual progress we may observe that moments of wonder do not arise in relation to snakes alone, but to rivers, as well – we are even prompted to accept that waves upon the sea, the constellations, cheese, social relations, and death may be included. Before we are led to wonder where this catalogue of "wondrous" phenomena might end, however, our path needs to be redirected. The question of the boy, above, is special because it is informed by a quality of wonder; it is for this reason that it calls for a manner of care. It is a beautiful question because it reveals an openness to his experience and a wonderful appreciation for the object of this experience. The question shows him at his most vulnerable and reverberates with the initial wonder he felt. It is an important question, therefore, because our response must sensitively take into account the innermost recesses of the questioner in his relations with the world.

Even if they do not strike us as being "philosophic" the questions of children very often arise out of wonder; consequently, their special appeal to us is owing to their being touched by the wondrous. For this reason, a response only truly speaks to such questions when something of this same intimacy is echoed in *it*.[24] Can it be that *any* question arising from wonder deserves the quality of attention we label "philosophic"? The philosophical understanding of wonder will be considered in the next chapter; in the meantime I seek to continue exploring its dimensions in lived experience.

Wonder-struck: *Wonder brings us to a standstill*

Vickie: One day, walking among the tulips in the garden I was unexpectedly struck with their vivid beauty, and the subtlety of their colours and forms. Of course, I'm very fond of flowers and take lots of pleasure in gardening, but this particular occasion was special and it *stopped* me in my tracks. It just grabbed me – not like a thought, there was an uncommon immediacy and wholeness to the experience, and it was accompanied by incredible joy. I somehow felt akin to the flowers. All this started with a definite sensation, a physical impact: 'Oh!'

James: I once had the opportunity to attend a seminar held by a distinguished composer, one for whom I had long held a deep admiration. There were many demands on his time and I had tried to think of what I would ask him if the chance arose. I decided to bring a score of his which I had found almost impenetrable, and simply ask him how he would perform it. So many people milling about this man! ... Crowds often produce some discomfort in me, and yet, summoning my courage I finally seized an occasion to introduce myself, showed him the piece, and asked my question. His response left me in complete wonder: he said, "Well... let's see." And with this he leaned over and started to look at it, I thought, as if he had *never seen it before*. This was not done in an artful manner, and you should understand that he had an extremely good memory – it's not that he'd forgotten the piece. When he responded like that I had a sense of amazement, like: "How could a person *do* that?" It was a magical moment; all of the confusion around us *evaporated*.

While not always expressed with all the visible signs of an awestruck child – aghast, eyes wide, mouth open – it is true nonetheless that the experience of wonder arrests us. We stop and stand in wonder (in this sense perhaps it is a true moment of *happenstance*?). When wonder arises it is as if the surface of water receives or is suddenly broken – with a gentle *plop* or a startling *splash* – by the presence of the unexpected. We are plunged into and saturated by wonder. Or, it is as if our steady, habitual course were radically redirected by an object which would not give way to or be subsumed by the usual inertia of our experience. However it is described, its impact is *felt* and it leaves its

impression: "*Oh*!" Wonder is most "striking" in its sudden and radical expressions; and yet, are we never gently stirred by wonder in some passing moment, while strolling in a garden, say, or as when, in the very instance that we gaze upon its face, a baby breaks into a smile? "Wonder strikes the heart but does not hurt it," says Augustine.[25] It is this gentle wonder, which stops an already restrained or leisurely pace, that the Japanese poet Ryōkan evokes:

> In the twilight
> crossing over
> Mount Kugami
> at the crest I heard
> the cry of a deer [26]

Notice that a casual glance around the room in which we sit may yield, upon inspection, an impressive number of "unknown" objects or phenomena. How is the synthetic carpet under my feet produced? I don't honestly know. What prompted our cat to swish its tail, just then? Again, I can't say for sure. And yet at present I don't find myself "struck" by these uncertainties. Nothing about them provokes the compelling urgency, the delight or disturbance of wonder. Why not? For one thing, none of them has intruded upon my attention unexpectedly – I went looking for them. The continuity of my experience has not been arrested in the case of the carpet or the cat. But in wonder I stop, or more properly, I *am stopped*, and it even seems that in some sense the world stops, too: "all the confusion around us *evaporated*." Or, if things do not stop perhaps their tenor suddenly modulates to a remarkable degree. In any case, something about the world changes, and this is our accustomed experience of it: *wonder is an experience of discontinuity*.

'Oh...': *Wonder leaves us speechless*

James There is a special moment in a forty part work of choral polyphony by Thomas Tallis. I still remember my first experience of hearing it. For a long time I felt immersed in its very intricate texture; it really is dense. But late in the work completely without warning it comes to a stop. And *then*, just as suddenly it begins again, but in a strikingly discontinuous manner. It is a moment of such penetrating beauty. My breath caught in that moment: it was like the sun rose.

Wonder and language, wonder and thought, do not co-exist. We have no words for what arises in wonder because it does not conform to, nor can it be absorbed into, the texture of habitual experience: (without knowing it) we are "at wit's end." In the sense that the phenomenon about which wonder has arisen is seen "anew," wonder arises only in relation to what is experienced as new or unique, and so the phenomenon cannot

be *re*-cognised or named. As is suggested by Matsuo Bashō, the fact that something is *anomalous* does not stand between our experience of it, quite the opposite:

> Not knowing
> The name of the tree,
> I stood in the flood
> Of its sweet smell.[27]

The standstill that wonder brings is not only bodily. Daily experience has a steady, predictable quality. Thought, language – all the means we employ for "making sense" – tend to acquire a familiar tenor or pattern. ("What are you looking at? It's only the *moon*!") To experience things as "predictable" means that by drawing upon past experience we extend ourselves into the future, in some sense imbuing the continuity of lived experience with duration or "length." (The lived present, *meanwhile*, is at best qualified and provisional.) But the wonder that arrests us is all so unexpected or unprecedented. Verhoeven remarks that "[t]his halting does not result from an inner deliberation; it is the involuntary break in a rhythm not only of thought but of the whole of life."[28] In wonder, the continuity of thought, language, experience – of living itself – is momentarily broken: we both "stop *short*" and our words "fall *short*."

Wonder promotes or incites an open space in the familiar texture of lived experience. Are we left speechless because thought and language are drawn right out of us? In the very next moment, with the choral polyphony beginning to "take shape" again, our listener relaxes and silently remarks, "Oh... that's wonderful." Are we *emptied* by wonder of our capacity for thought? No: wonder is *more* than thought and language can bear. In wonder, thought, speech, and action are momentarily suspended. We are drawn into and become *filled* by wonder.

In a new light: *Wonder opens our eyes*

Bruce: I was in the National Gallery, becoming rather overwhelmed by the sheer quantity of art and feeling a bit hurried. Then I walked into a room with a large Cézanne in it. I "recognised" the painting, but this was different: its presence, here, made it almost *leap* off the wall. I was totally unprepared for this. It was such a surprise to see something familiar in this new light. The whole room came alive, and the rest of my visit to the gallery was charged with a silent wonder to the beauty around me. It all began in that one moment.

Teresa: A short while ago I was visiting with my mother. We were in the kitchen while she was doing some cooking: nothing unusual. But, all of a sudden, everything about her just *moved* me: it was like a shock of recognition. I

> don't know why this should just happen, but it was as if I was seeing all her dimensions at once – wife, mother, friend. Maybe it was the light grace in her movements, which bore no trace of the passage of time. However it began, in one sweeping moment I felt her *entire life* stand out before me; she took shape for me in that moment in a new and lovely way. For the first time I felt I was seeing her as a *whole* person!

In wonder we see with new eyes. Again, the familiar current of experience has shifted to reveal something new: a rich beauty and depth that has emerged from the midst of the familiar, and which compels us. It leads me to suggest that with wonder it may be useful to distinguish between "seeing" and "really seeing." What is it to speak of "new eyes" and "really seeing"? *To see* something is a manner of viewing wherein that which we expect to see appears: what appears confirms our expectations. *To see* something is an action attributable to the viewer; an object conforms to our (pre)view of what it "should" be. However, wonder is experienced as a "dilation of attention."[29] *Really* to see something implies that the object itself stands out or is "brought to our attention" in a new way. ("Imagine... I'd *never noticed* that before!") Wonder is a passive experience; the "seeing" that occurs in wonder is not a process whereby our vision actively reveals things of the world to us. Rather, things reveal themselves to our opened eyes. Of course, wonder is not limited to vision alone.[30] For instance, it is equally true to say that wonder puts us into intimate *contact* ("in touch") with something, or that we "hear with new ears." Regardless of the sense through which wonder moves us, wonder is experienced as an integrity. Seeing (touching, and so on) something in this new way is to be fully present and open to its possibilities.

While it is not vital to question why this particular painting should suddenly "come alive" in the experience above, it is an interesting happenstance that the viewer has been sensitive to what Merleau-Ponty considered a special gift of this artist: "The 'world's instant' that Cézanne wanted to paint, an instant long since passed away, is still *thrown at us* by his paintings."[31] Merleau-Ponty's observation is highly suggestive of wonder in general. In wonder things reveal themselves to us in an active and compelling sense. Indeed, so compelling is the experience of wonder, at times, that everything in our experience may become illuminated – flooded – by its special light.[32]

Looking again to my cat – now she yawns and begins to clean a front paw – I see nothing *unfamiliar* here, even though I cannot locate, measure or fully describe the conditions that prompt her to do this. While it is, thus, true that I may denote her yawning and so forth as "unknown" phenomena, this is merely word-play. In spite of the fact that they

may be inscrutable at times, I am comfortable and familiar with our cat's mannerisms.[33] The cat's yawn is not unfamiliar to me precisely because it is *familiar* to me. But when wonder arises the familiar is seen in an unfamiliar light. What could be less unusual than your or my mother's manner of cooking? That one should find something unexpected here is in itself unexpected. How many times has this person observed her mother busy in the kitchen? What can be so different about this occasion? (Doubtless Mr. Palomar could oblige us with a rich array of conjectures, should we ask.) Yet something has happened: the familiar has become deepened or enriched. It is rather awkward to assert that familiarity and unfamiliarity actually occur together; after all, we do not wish to say that the face of our daughter or son is not "recognised" when seen in wonder. Even so, in wonder the tenor of familiarity modulates.[34]

Apart from this subtlety there is one striking *co-incidence* at the heart of wonder: something becomes open to us in the same moment that we become open to it. This seems more than a dilation of attention, in that it is an opening of everything that we are to something. Wonder leaves an impression, therefore, because we are open to the imprint of the "other."

'Look!': *Wonder calls to us*

Vickie: Recently I was interrupted at work to deal with an older woman. She had been waiting a long time for a social worker to see her and when I finally got there she blurted out all sorts of eccentric complaints. Very quickly I had her pegged as being off her medication and I found myself dealing with her very "professionally," at a distance. (I'm not very comfortable admitting this.) Yet, I suppose there was a moment when I could *see* myself viewing her in this way. I can't say that this did it, but after this internal pause all of a sudden something *switched* for me, and I saw her as a real person. It's hard to explain, but seeing this ragged old woman in this way was a *wonder* for me. There was a kind of beauty to her, just as she was. Once this happened the whole tone of our conversation altered and it became a good exchange.

Paul: While participating in the retreat I'd been spending a lot of time simply walking – in the woods, along the beach. As I was walking this one day the tonal quality of the things around me began to change. I especially recall the striking, distinct beauty of the individual stones lying on the beach, and their complex patterns and relations with one another. In my musings I have sometimes encountered and even cultivated this before, this enchantment or magical seeing. This time, too, I was moved by a deep appreciation that this marvellous web of relations extended to me as well. But in the midst of this wonderment I began to sense something unfamil-

> iar resounding in me, and then slowly the intricate and intimate connectedness I had been experiencing softly immersed *all* of my relations. I can say that this occasion of wonder transformed my way of viewing the people in my life – I suddenly wanted to reach out and give freely and lovingly of myself. It promoted a new way of being in me. I'm so grateful I have lived long enough to see this.

Wonder is a *pure seeing* in which the person seeing, the "seer," is suspended or absent. Put in another fashion, one only *sees*: one does not identify with the seen, the process of seeing, or the fact of being the seer. What is the experience of being a "seer"? It becomes pronounced when I look about the room in profound boredom or apathy: I see a flat and inanimate world. Nothing here beckons me: no task moves me to begin it; no book calls to be started or continued; not one photograph on the shelf recalls friend or loved one (not *really*). Any human relation of which I conceive is empty or, rather, is overladen with this colourless (or discoloured) miasma. Disinterest and indifference imbue my world utterly. In this way the present moment and the spatial presence are *full* of the seer. (Nothing in such a state will be connoted congenially as "timely," "momentous," or "spacious.") All the people and things of the world become incidental and without worth to the subject and – it is vital to note – *along with* the subject. None of this is so in wonder. In wonder, the heavy presence of oneself alone is dispelled, brought to a halt by what Martin Heidegger refers to as the "sudden sheer descent or rise that marks the chasm's edge."[35] But the impressive discontinuity of this halting moment is not only a matter of suddenness. Rather, a fundamental shift occurs in the texture of experience: the seer vanishes in the simple fact or process of *seeing*. Now ("at last," for it can be a great relief) something is seen, as we say, in "its own right."

In the moment of wonder things come to life or, better, the life they always possess is revealed and appreciated. Wonder places us in contact with an enlarged or enriched world of relations and experience. Periods of enduring apathy express the mute, opaque world of a seer for whom the seen – the people and things with which we live – has nothing to say, no "voice of its own." But in wonder the world is animated with interest; it suddenly becomes *appealing*, just as surely as a beloved child capering into our room with breathless news. Wonder *calls* us. In this way, as an experience of compelling openness which reveals and propels us into new possibilities, wonder naturally beckons us into relations with the world. It reveals a significance which draws us forward even while withdrawing from us, beckoning. Heidegger writes,

> Once we are drawn into the withdrawal, we are, somewhat like migratory birds, but in an entirely different way, caught in the pull of what draws, at-

> tracts us by its withdrawal. And once we, being so attracted, are drawing toward what draws us, our essential being already bears the stamp of that "pull."[36]

In addition to the "standstill" of wonder, therefore, that stillness within the incessant continuity of familiar experience, wonder possesses a dynamic quality wherein we feel ourselves caught and implicated in the flow of its deep current. In so doing, the appealing wonder of the "other" calls on us to respond. Wonder *urges* us. The call of wonder is in the imperative: *"Look!"*[37] Depending on the force with which it impresses me, wonder's imperative call may be soft as an invitation, urgent as an appeal, or directive as a summons.

Our enriched contact with the "other" promotes a refinement of response. Out of the heart of wonder, and our mutual implicatedness with the "other," comes a call that tugs on us to respond, and equally, a call for attentive and gentle regard. The open and intimate experience of the wonder of another deserves this delicacy, since wonder involves what might be called the "whatness" of things,[38] and so all that *is* is entailed in it.

The wonder of it all: *Wonder gives things their meaning*

Peter: Watching all the school kids arrive one morning I noticed a boy being helped out of the car by his mother. He was obviously quite handicapped and looked, you know, "like a boy whose mother had dressed him". They got out of the car, the boy had his lunch bag, and together they made their way haltingly into the school. At a point in all this I can't locate something happened. Before I knew it the experience just became intensely *rich*: I was aware that their life together was highly challenged and yet here they were just walking along, chatting. They were completely *okay* with each other. The poignancy of the moment touched me very deeply. I felt as though I was suddenly becoming aware of their whole lives together. These people were entirely unknown to me, and yet I was suddenly so appreciative of the care which was bestowed on this young boy, and of the fact that he was *simply himself*.

Teresa: When I was a student in Strasbourg I had to walk across a bridge on the Rhine every day to get to the university. On this particular day I lingered awhile in the middle to look out over the city and for some reason all of a sudden became profoundly affected by all the old buildings, and the parks, and the people. There was a touching, timeless beauty to the whole scene. A powerful appreciation welled up in that moment as it dawned on me that for centuries people had lived and died here, and had stood *right* where I was standing: *all those human beings*. And instead of being the reference point for everything in my life I was suddenly taken outside of my-

> self. I was deeply appreciative – just to be living, just to be alive to experience all of this.

Wonder brings us into intimate contact with things. There is nothing half-hearted about it – any more than we can remain only partially dampened when plunged into a river. People and things really come to life in wonder. Verhoeven comments: "I pause in wonder because a thing is as it is, in this moment, and not different. It is precisely the emerging 'thusness' of the thing that provokes wonder."[39] When I see something in this new light I gain a fresh appreciation for it: it means more to me. People and things revealed in the light of wonder are shown to have intrinsic beauty and worth. Therefore when wonder arises it does so with an appreciation both for the presence of the wondrous, and simultaneously, for *being* present – in this moment, and for this person or thing. For this reason (and in the strictest sense) wonder is *contemplation*. The other is open *for* us as it is open *to* us, as itself; and we are open to and for all of this as we are open to ourselves.

Even so, that for which wonder arises does not become entirely exposed to us. The wondrous acquires deep meaning and significance for us, but does not become "known," once and for all. It may happen that wonder presents us with an answer to a question we didn't know we had; conversely, it may present us with a question we assumed was answered.[40] Thus, when I am struck by wonder for something, in appreciation for all that it is and for all that remains (even now) beyond my purview, I am compelled to look upon it with a certain *modesty*.

Emerging out of the deep acceptance residing at the heart of it all, alongside of the urging to *do* is an equally sonorous call simply to *be*.[41] The acceptance proper to wonder comes at the price of certainty, and the delimitation and denotation of our experience. It entails a softening of our struggle with the living process in which we are implicated. It entails as well the emergence of *consent*. In wonder, we consent to be, and in so doing become open to a grateful appreciation simply for being. What is it that keeps us longing for life? Not, Rilke suggests, the fact that happiness exists, or out of curiosity,

> But because *truly* being here is so much; because everything here apparently needs us, this fleeting world, which in some strange way keeps calling to us. Us, the most fleeting of all.[42]

In the passive yet curiously dynamic experience of wonder words fall short; then too, among the responses natural to wonder – among those actions we *choose* to undertake

following this experience – is *silence*. In reference to this active suspension of language it is with great appreciation that Roland Barthes cites a *haiku* by Bashō:

> *How admirable he is*
> *Who does not think "Life is ephemeral"*
> *when he sees a flash of lightening*[43]

The open face: *Wonder exposes our vulnerability*

Peter: I noticed this fellow as he walked into the café. He was making rather odd gestures and my first thought was that he was trying to be funny – an instant later, with a *jolt*, I realised that he had cerebral palsy. This mistake really "brought me to attention," and after he sat down more or less directly across from me I found it doubly hard not to notice him. Seeing him in the middle of the café, with this immense awkwardness describing every action, I became moved with a sense of compassion for this man. I knew that he was simply *unable* to be inconspicuous in the way I took for granted. When the waiter came to take his order it became clear from their banter that he was a regular here. And then, a few seconds later something else caught my attention: *a bicycle helmet*! It really hit me. He had ridden here, in traffic, on a *bike*! I considered this for a moment and then it just seemed to open his whole life up to me: here is a person utterly undaunted by challenges, who meets life squarely in everything he does. I was *filled* with admiration and respect for him. Although I can express these things now, the whole moving impression of this man swept over me in a torrent, and for several days this wonder and appreciation would resurface, and saturate me. He gave me this gift.

The openness at the heart of wonder is *impressive*. We are moved, urged, by its call both to respond and simply to be. Are we also at times *disturbed*? "To be disturbed": perhaps this is still another way of describing the impact of wonder upon us. Do we find the café-goer, above, disturbed? In the sudden jolt of attention, certainly, but what of the situation of finding himself face to face with this particular young man? More to the point, is there *wonder* in this?

Is it possible that after all these reflections we find ourselves beginning again? What kind of thing is wonder? Can we say, as yet? The more I consider the experience the more I find myself in its wake. Rather like water it can possess stunning force, yet remain forever ungraspable. One can slowly become submerged, as when the bather gently slips into a pool or is gradually overtaken by the incremental lapping of a warm tide – or, it can strike with the suddenness of a rogue wave.

In these reflections I have sought to illustrate some of the qualities of wonder: that it delights and inspires; that it draws us to things and establishes a space between us; that it reveals and perplexes; and that in wonder people or things become both beautifully, touchingly unfamiliar, and stirringly, profoundly familiar. Yet now I wish to suggest that it also disturbs. Since it is such comfort to dwell where wonder is situated in the vicinity of the "wonderful," that is, the beautiful or lovely, its potential for stirring us, and perhaps leaving us in deep disquiet, may often be dismissed or ignored.

A little girl comes running into the house from the front yard where she has been playing. The girl's cries, but equally, the urgent and purposeful sound of her feet, bring her mother in haste.

"Mommy! Charlie! A car hit Charlie!"

She reaches for her mother's arms and the two of them rush through the door and down the steps, hurrying across the pavement to find the neighbour's dog lying prone on the street. Putting her daughter down the woman gently touches the animal, probing its body for life. There is no response. Only the trace of blood at its open, still mouth offers any outward sign of its injuries. The girl gazes at the dog and her mother in tremulous silence.

"Mommy, is Charlie... *dead*?"

It is not a word she has had occasion to utter very often. Although softly spoken across the intimate space between herself and her mother the word is weighted with anticipation.

"I'm afraid so, Emily."

For several moments longer the girl looks, and then very slowly she reaches down to the animal: cautiously at first, her small hand approaches the long fur on its back, then she moves it towards his neck. She touches his exposed ear, then strokes his forehead ever so gently between his dull eyes where the fine fur lies smoothly back – between his eyes, which had always greeted her so happily, and made her happy, in turn. It is when the dog's owner comes and lifts Charlie's limp form to carry him away that Emily, now clasping her mother's warm hand, begins, softly, to cry.

This incident could, of course, have developed very differently. Neighbours frantically rushing about, an angry driver, a mother's firm refusal ("Now you stay right *here*, Emily!") or understandable panic ("That could have been *my daughter*!"), the dog's agonised yelps or shocking visible injuries – any of these might have stimulated an engulf-

ing fear or caused her open gaze to recoil from this pathetic animal on the street: any of them might have risen up between the girl and the experience as given. Any number of conditions could have made the experience *frightfully* disturbing. Nevertheless, on this occasion they were not present, and so my question is this: do we also find wonder in moments of this kind? The child has no reason not to accept the ministrations and word of her mother, or the evidence of her own eyes and hand; she is open to the experience as it unfolds by virtue of who she is. What sort of urging do we find? What is there to *do* here? In a sense, nothing; and yet, might the call of wonder (look!) be reflected back from this poor creature to the young girl herself? For the first time in her short life, perhaps, the child is present for and responds to a wonder which stirs and disturbs her in this way. (Many an adult would be hard pressed to "absorb the shock that wonder causes"[44] with this sensitivity.) Should we try to prevent such a thing from happening? Is the child too young for this? And more generally, what can it mean, simply to *be* in the face of such wonder?

"In wonder, everything is at stake," says Verhoeven.[45] Wonder does not only *open* us to something: in the way that we use these words, we become "open" in appreciation for and "moved" by what is beautiful and meaningful, but we become "exposed" to and "disturbed" by the tremendous, awful, and profound. Wonder both opens us to rich possibilities and exposes us to our vulnerability. Indeed, some experiences may reveal these dimensions simultaneously:

> *Betty:* It happened after all the intense effort, the letting go, and the inescapable vulnerability of giving birth – when they placed him on my chest. Words are so inadequate for this, but right before my eyes my baby changed colour, from being a little creature tinged with blue to being fully alive, all flushed with red. Although he is grown up now it's something I can always recall with a fresh mind, as if it had only recently happened: there's this little baby who has been a part of me for so long... and then, suddenly – *here he is*!

Here is a moment deeply situated in the robust, ongoing flow of living, and yet which speaks at the same time of the delicacy and stark vulnerability of beginning. "To begin": even the verb in the infinitive stands poised and exposed; it is open to so much, so much depends upon it (and it, upon so much). But I wonder, is *beginning* not an abstraction? When, precisely, can an event really be said to start? where? Can it be that beginning is really a *continuing*? It seems so, at least as any beginning is situated in the flow of living. Yet continuity implies change or activity of an even, regular type, whereas to begin is somehow to disturb, or redirect, or transform this continuous activity. Any sort of be-

ginning thus alters the course of living, the nature of becoming. Then again, when are we *not* beginning? In daily living I seem always to be doing something – moving, listening, thinking, looking, speaking. Are all of these actions expressions of beginning? and do they all to some degree transform my manner of living? ... How, in the midst of all these queries, is it even possible to begin?

It seems that I can neither *not* begin, nor that any beginning is an independent, solitary event. Rather, it is conditioned by, participates in, and contributes to an ever-changing texture of experience – and it does so *simultaneously*. All of this becomes a problem for language and for thought, since time is deferred by simultaneity. To begin anything is perhaps to implicate everything: causality is at work, and thus the great matters of life and death. A mother gazes upon her newly born child: her wonder arises with the flush of his life. His presence with her – their presence together – is a simple, wondrous fact. In such moments, to be caught in wonder is to be deeply aware that life "begins," or that it continues anew. In an important sense, to address the nature and experience of beginning is, equally, to address the nature and experience of wonder. For this reason, to attempt a phenomenological inquiry of wonder may demand more than we are normally called upon to give, for in some ways it calls for a perpetual willingness to begin. But notice: do we not, in perpetually beginning, perpetually come to a halt, an end, as well?

Clara: Years ago I flew quite a distance in order to attend the fiftieth birthday party of a close friend named Daniel. It was all great *fun*, and such a pleasure to get to know his wife better too. After visiting them for a few days I had to set out for the airport again. Standing at the front door taking our leave of each other, he and I embraced warmly. What happened in that moment will sound peculiar, but with my arms around this dear man I was suddenly *engulfed* by a dark, kind of leaden feeling: *I knew that he was dying*. I can't say what he may have seen in my eyes when we released one another, but the sudden depth of my sadness and helpless confusion very nearly undid me.

Once again wonder is seen to situate a person face to face with the unutterably profound. What is to be *done*, here? How can one simply *be* in the presence of that which so deeply disturbs? and, is this "being" a manner of response, of "doing"? Is there any more startling shift of experience than the discontinuity of death itself? To stand acknowledging its presence – to hear and respond to its call (look!) – may be to experience wonder of the most disturbing kind. Here, too, there are conditions that might have prevented or shattered the integrity of this experience – a raucous joke, sudden external distractions, fearful or dogmatic denial. Of the things perhaps most antithetical to won-

der are those predispositions situated along the axis of certainty and denial. ("No! This can *not* be happening!") However, the present situation is different. The parting described here deserved the intimacy of a warm and honest embrace, and therefore unavoidably exposed this person to whatever might be revealed in wonder. Heidegger observes,

> The quiet heart of the opening is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being and thinking, that is presence and apprehending, can arise at all.[46]

The disturbing intimacy of wonder in one of "quiet heart" is unmitigated. What can be more immediate than the eyes of another in embrace? After all, it is the nature of the embrace that before we can "release" ourselves from it – while engaged, "locked," in it – we must *open* our arms still further. This is truly a dilemma. While in embrace I hold and am held. Accordingly, if wonder reveals the other in a new light, if the "who" or "what" is transformed to my open eyes, what happens to *me*? Where do we find ourselves in wonder? do we, instead, *lose* ourselves? While looking into the face of another in embrace, moreover, do we only see the other's face, or do we also see our own reflected back to us – and if the other's is the face of a beloved friend approaching death, what *then*? Perhaps if it were another person – one less dear(?) – we could turn away.... But if we refuse to refuse the other, if we stand firm or steadfastly affirm the other, we also affirm ourselves: in this instance do we, accordingly, affirm *our* death? The narrative continues:

Clara: A short time later I received word: his wife wrote me of their terrible shock at the news of his advanced cancer. And then he died. ... Now I was back at their home, the afternoon after his death. Another friend had worked several years in Nepal and had participated in funerals there, so with this man's guidance Daniel's wife, a couple of other friends and I began, in the sun lit room where he died, to wash and tend to the body as a way of really saying our goodbyes, and honouring him. As you can imagine, it was done with considerable care, and when it was finally completed a lovely ease and stillness settled upon the group of us. In the space created by our attentive silence I felt moved to say some words which might speak to the occasion. They weren't *planned*, they just came out of me, or through me. The atmosphere in the room was deeply loving and appreciative. Others spoke.... And *then* it happened. (Please be mindful that the words for this are not easily found.) In a simple, stunning moment I felt something in and around me *release*, or open, as the south window and wall of the room sort of *dissolved* and became softly luminous. I could feel something like a breeze or current moving in the direction of the open wall, drawing "Daniel" out of the room. The beauty and wonder

> of it all was so striking; I felt *acutely* grateful to be present for it. And I *knew*, while it was happening – in my bones and in my cells – that we, too, each one of us, would one day follow.

What has one to say after this? ... This inquiry has seemingly brought us to the very edge, are we now being urged to step beyond what we can conceive? "The basis of things is unfathomable abyss and anyone who wants to get to the bottom of things must take this into account."[47]

Yet the infinite extent of things, too, must be borne in mind, must it not? "It is only when you have come to know the surface of things ... that you can venture to seek what is underneath. But the surface of things is inexhaustible."[48] These, you may remember, are the words of Mr. Palomar. Is it surprising that this most meticulous of observers should finally settle upon the great question of death's meaning? As is his wont Mr. Palomar considers the question very carefully, orienting himself towards it with elaborate care: how should one conceive of this state? perhaps "being dead" has its benefits? what becomes of "me" at death?

> [B]eing dead is less easy than it might seem. First of all, you must not confuse being dead with not being, a condition that occupies the vast expanse of time before birth, apparently symmetrical with the other, equally vast expanse that follows death. In fact, before birth we are part of the infinite possibilities that may or may not be fulfilled; whereas, once dead, we cannot fulfill ourselves either in the past (to which we now belong entirely but on which we can no longer have any influence) or in the future (which, even if influenced by us, remains forbidden to us). Mr. Palomar's case is really simpler, since his capacity for having an influence on anything or anybody has always been negligible: the world can very well do without him, and he can consider himself dead quite serenely, without even altering his habits.[49]

Mr. Palomar's approach to "death," as to all of the perplexities of his life, clearly bears the stamp of his fastidious nature. We never learn how the death of, say, a former lover or a favourite nephew effects this man. This may reflect a deep resistance on his part to close personal attachments, or it may merely be due to the confined ambit of our knowing him: in any case, speculation serves no purpose here. What we do see is that Mr. Palomar's manner of attending to the question of death differs in no discernible way from his long-practised approach to those other queries that have engaged him. As a result, rather like a water-beetle that apparently keeps even its feet dry while flitting endlessly and with facility upon the taut surface of a pond, even here, whether through certainty, denial, or some variety of inordinate scruple, Mr. Palomar does not probe, he does not really extend or open himself to this matter. It is a pity. We are not able to say

what prevents it from arising, but even to the very periphery of death itself wonder finds no crack. Conscientious as always, in the end Mr. Palomar establishes yet another project with which to occupy himself:

> "If time has to end, it can be described, instant by instant," Mr. Palomar thinks, "and each instant, when described, expands so that its end can no longer be seen." He decides that he will set himself to describing every instant of his life, and until he has described them all he will no longer think of being dead. At that moment he dies.[50]

In this way, even the experience of death passes this man while evidently making not the slightest impression or appeal: is it possible that like life death can, as we say, "go on without us"? Even in the face of death Mr. Palomar sees only the reflection of his own uniform and indifferent attentiveness. Forever concerned with the surface of things – not without reason, of course – Mr. Palomar is never able to open himself up to participate in or be drawn into their depth and lived meaning. While focussing upon their extent, he fails to extend *himself*; the affirmation and the transforming intimacy, the reach and the release of embrace elude him. It may be that we feel sadness for the man because he does not experience the wonder which constitutes so precious a part of what it is to live.

Standing in the face of life as seen with eyes of wonder exposes our vulnerability no less than standing in the face of death. Of course, regardless of the degree to which we find ourselves in wonder, we are all born, experience the oscillations of daily living, and eventually die. But in wonder our unavoidable participation in life is demonstrated; in wonder we become aware that we are wholly implicated in the flow of living. True, this is to admit to and accept the perpetual ambiguity that the startling appeal, the intimate vulnerability, the exposed mystery, the surface and the abyss situate us before. While we do not seem able to stand in the discontinuity of wonder continuously, however, our honesty with that which wonder reveals promotes a manner of thinking and living which may be called "philosophic" in the strongest sense. Indeed, looking back to the Greek tradition Heidegger identifies Socrates as someone whose life was engaged in standing, unblinking, in wonder's face: "All through his life and right into his death, Socrates did nothing else but place himself into this draft, this current, and maintain himself in it."[51] *Standing in the current of wonder*: "wonder," the experience of discontinuity – is the phenomenology of wonder both a continuity and a discontinuity? can the ambiguity of wonder extend as far as this?

Do we yet know what wonder is, I wonder? (Is it too late in this inquiry to begin again?) It was the plunge into the river's current that initially started this journey, and the meta-

phor of the "current" has appeared in several guises along its course. A man watching television, a woman on the phone, are caught in the meaningless and flat sameness of ordinary experience. This is the bleak current of deadening continuity. Alternately, a breathless encounter with a snake, touching delicacy in the presence of a dead animal, the response to a bed of tulips, a "Cézanne," an old woman, and a disabled school boy, place us in a dynamic flow or current of experience. Being stuck in the "current of inured experience"; slipping into a "current of wondering"; and even, being caught standing, exposed to the "current ("draft," "breeze") of wonder" itself: is this not confusing? If wonder is an experience of discontinuity, how can it also situate us in a current, that is, a continuous flow? Have the ideas and metaphors connoting this experience become entangled?

It may be possible to speak of the steady, sometimes turbid, continuity of ordinary experience, and the dynamic, lively continuity of wonder. Even so, what is the arresting experience of *discontinuity* at the heart of wonder? It cannot be a discontinuity of *life*, which evidently "continues" in apathy and wonder alike. Rather, I suggest that it is a discontinuity very near the core of experience itself.

In "normal" experience that is entirely removed from wonder, while we may act according to legal constraint and conventional nicety – or habit – no act responds to the deep urging of the people or things around us; moreover, neither the myriad people and things of the world, nor we ourselves, are allowed simply to be. Where access to wonder is refused through dogmatic certainty or fearful denial (which may amount to the same thing[53]) a person has no choice but to live in a world in which only that about which he or she has "made sense" or which "stands to reason" is permitted. In wonder, though, "*we* stop short": we participate in, rather than merely observe, life around us; we are fully present for the other and drawn out of ourselves; the intrinsic beauty and worth of the other is seen purely for itself, free of reflexive reference; we acknowledge a deep acceptance of what presently *is*. That is, wonder does not expose our vulnerability to life; rather it exposes the vulnerability of that which shores up and attempts to contain the natural, flowing current of life.

The implications of wonder resound deeply in living experience. It seems that my very sense of who I am in relation to the world is largely governed by the tenor of my response to the discontinuity wonder provokes. My struggle within the dynamic continuity of living is increasingly apparent in the degree to which "my world" is discordant with the "life world" revealed by wonder: the more "striking" (and conceivably threat-

ening) the experience, the more I may feel compelled to recoil and protect myself through the convolutions of certainty and denial. In wonder it is one's conception of *identity* which is exposed and vulnerable.[50] The arresting gap we experience is the halt of our habitual (and perpetuating) mode of making sense. In wonder, the fact that we are irremediably implicated in all of life is sometimes gently, sometimes forcefully, made transparent. To honour the wonder we experience is to consent openly to the current of living in which we – simultaneously – both find, and lose, ourselves. The phenomenon of wonder is therefore not the discontinuity of experience, but of experience *as conceived*. It is in wonder, that we are urged to be fully who we are.

NOTES

[1] Italo Calvino, *Mr. Palomar*, trans. W. Weaver (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovitch, Publishers, 1986), 113.

[2] Ibid., 3-4.

[3] Ibid., 6.

[4] "The idea that everything in the universe is connected and corresponds never leaves him: a variation in the brightness of the Crab nebula or the condensation of a globular mass in Andromeda cannot help having some influence on the functioning of his record player or on the freshness of the watercress leaves in his salad bowl" (ibid., 117).

[5] Ibid., 7.

[6] Ibid., 55.

[7] As "interest" means to stand in the midst of something, or be present for it, "disinterest" indicates a experienced distance to people and things in the world. We are absent to things/people and they to us. See Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1977), 347.

[8] To varying degrees, from this point forward the study employs interview material gleaned from conversations conducted over a three year period. Informed consent has been given for these interviews. In one or two cases this was not possible, but no indication of the person's identity remains in the accounts. In all instances in which interviews are used or meditators are referred to, names, occupations, and sometimes gender, are changed to ensure anonymity. The only exceptions to this are the late Anagarika Dhamma Dinna, Achan Sobin S. Namto, and the Ven. Henepola Gunarantana, each of whom has dedicated much energy to teaching meditation on a broad – even international – scale.

Throughout my "use" of these conversation excerpts what I have sought is, in Terrance Carson's words (referring to the work of Paul Ricoeur), to "restore a dialogue between explanation and understanding by envisaging an 'interpretive arc' which alternates between moments of naïve understanding, explanation, and appropriation." – Terrance R. Carson, "Closing the Gap Between Research and Practice: Conversation as a Mode of Doing Research," *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* 4, no. 2 (1986): 84.

[9] *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "wonder."

[10] Ibid.

[11] Heidegger remarks astutely on the drifting nature of language: "it is not we who play with words; rather, the essence of language plays with us,[...] not only now, but long since and always. For language plays with our speech – it likes to let our speech drift away into the more obvious meanings of words. It is as though man had to make an effort to live properly with language. It is as though such a dwelling were especially prone to succumb to the danger of commonness" (*Basic Writings*, 365).

[12] Cornelis Verhoeven, *The Philosophy of Wonder*, trans. M. Foran (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972), 36.

[13] All of these pertain to what Verhoeven refers to as the physiognomy of wonder; see ibid., 36-38.

[14] In a brief work written shortly after the beginning of his "later" period Ludwig Wittgenstein ("A Lecture on Ethics," *The Philosophical Review* 74, no. 1 [January 1965]) effectively displays the crucial distinction within types of wondering as well as its deep relation, in certain cases, *to* wonder. He notes that in one sense, "I wonder at the existence of the world" (8) is nonsense, for one cannot imagine the world not existing. Some varieties of wonder simply reflect our thinking *about* things. However, there is another way of seeing this expression which reflects thinking about something which has first been infused *by* it: "And now I will describe the experience of wondering at the existence of the world by saying: it is the experience of seeing the world as a miracle" (11). In this case wondering is a process of deeply reflecting upon the world in such a way that it is attuned to an experience of having seen it "as a miracle," that is, a *wonder*.

[15] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 186-195. Verhoeven evocatively describes this here: "The thought that accompanies movement and slows it down to a ritardando is a special sort of thought which we call musing. Thought is playing with possibilities, creating space around things. Musing is a game with those possibilities that movement has passed by" (194).

[16] Szymborska, *A View with a Grain of Sand*, 165-66.

[17] On this occasion the question of the specific "name" of the snake is irrelevant, since it is the experience itself, which is so new, that most concerns the boy. The specific naming of the creature may distract from the mere experience, as expressed in Ursula K. Le Guin's delightful reference to "all the Linnaean qualifiers that had trailed along behind them... like tin cans tied to a tail." *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* (Markham ON: Penguin Books Canada Ltd., 1987), 195.

[18] We need not look for only one word among these, since each has a rather synonymous relation with the other. For instance, just as one's breath may be "caught" in wonder or wonder may bring one "to a standstill," we also speak of "halting in amazement." Similarly, the Greek word *thaumazein* is translated variously as "wonder" and "astonishment."

[19] Jerome A. Miller, "Wonder as Hinge," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 29 (March 1989): 51-66, achieves a fine sense of this with his example of a girl exploring a house, standing before the door of a room she has never entered. "She is not frozen in the present so much as she is held spellbound by a future she cannot reduce to any present she has ever known. In that sense, even though the door itself is still closed, her small world is already breached" (54-55).

[20] Calvino, *Mr. Palomar*, 98.

[21] J. Ph. Vogel, *Indian Serpent-Lore or the Nāgas in Hindu Legend and Art* (Varanasi: Indological Book House, 1972), 23.

[22] The question of how to "answer" children's deep questions is thoughtfully treated in J. H. van den Berg, *The Changing Nature of Man: Introduction to a Historical Psychology*, trans. H. F. Croes (New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1975). Often, the responses of adults effectively disjoin what is for the child whole. For instance, to a question about why leaves turn red in the autumn, the "factual" response concerning the cooling temperatures may make no sense: for a very small child, what could colour and temperature have to do with one another (p67-69)? To this question van den Berg offers: "Because it is so beautiful, child. Don't you see how beautiful it is, all these autumn colours?" He then continues, "There is no truer answer. That *is* how the leaves are red. An answer which does not invoke questions, which does not lead the child into an endless series of questions, to which each answer is a threshold" (69).

[23] As expressed by the Chilean biologist Dr. Humberto Maturana, in a colloquium in Calgary on November 17-18, 1992, entitled, "Biology, Emotions and Culture: the Origins of Patriarchy and the Future of Human Understanding." Gareth B. Matthews *Philosophy and the Young Child* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1980), has shown that deep forms of philosophical perplexity can be observed in the questioning of young children.

[24] In this view, philosophic inquiry must always maintain contact with its subject, it must maintain a living sense of immediacy and respect. As a consequence, if it is to remain true to its origins any philosophic inquiry into *metaphysics* must exercise considerable care to keep in touch with lived experience. On the other hand, owing to the exceeding delicacy required, I might even suggest that to conduct a phenomenology of wonder it is crucial that one cultivate a "pedagogical" attitude towards it. Seeking throughout *The Philosophy of Wonder* to reveal philosophy as the "radicalization of wonder," Verhoeven makes the following connection between questions, answers, wonder, and philosophy: "Wonder, being suspended between question and answer, is the human measure of this thought. Wonder halts the question at a frontier that it will never be able to pass in the form of a definitive answer. It prevents the answer from bogging down in dogmatic certitude and phraseology. In a certain sense wonder restores the answer to the question and keeps open the possibility of a different answer. In this way it keeps thought in motion so that it never comes to an end where it finds what it seeks. It ends only when it ceases, when thought stops. In its most minimal and most essential form, philosophy is nothing but the radical expression of wonder, time and again" (111).

[25] Cited in Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 40; the Latin is given (but not the source): *Percutit cor meum sine laesine.*

[26] Burton Watson, trans., *Ryōkan: Zen Monk-Poet of Japan* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977), 17.

[27] Matsuo Bashō, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*, trans. N. Yuasa (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1966), 79.

[28] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 37.

[29] I am grateful to Windsor Viney for this (characteristically apt) phrase.

[30] It is easy to slip into an inadvertent extension of sight to include other senses, and beyond – as reflected by our common equation of "seeing" with "knowing." Levinas notes that, "As Heidegger, after St. Augustine, pointed out, we use the term vision indifferently for every experience, even when it involves other senses than sight. [...] It is incontestable that objectification operates in the gaze in a privileged way; it is not certain that its tendency to inform every experience is inscribed, and unequivocably so, in being." Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity: An Essay on Exteriority*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1979), 188.

[31] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, trans. J.M. Edie (Evanston IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1964), 169 (emphasis added). Merleau-Ponty says, more generally: "The painter lives in fascination. The actions most proper to him – those gestures, those paths which he alone can trace and which will be revelations to others (because the others do not lack what he lacks or in the same way) – to him they seem to emanate from the things themselves, like the patterns of the constellations" (167).

[32] I cannot resist quoting, here, from Thomas Merton's *Asian Journal*, where the Catholic writer-monk visits Polonnaruwa, a site in Sri Lanka where enormous figures of the Buddha and his attendant Ananda are carved into a stone hillside: "Looking at these figures I was suddenly,

almost forcibly, jerked clean out of the habitual, half-tied vision of things, and an inner clearness, clarity, as if exploding from the rocks themselves, became evident and obvious. The queer *evidence* of the reclining figure, the smile, the sad smile of Ananda standing with arms folded (much more 'imperative' than Da Vinci's Mona Lisa because completely simple and straightforward). The thing about all this is that there is no puzzle, no problem, and really no 'mystery.' All problems are resolved and everything is clear, simply because what matters is clear. [...] I don't know when in my life I have ever had such a sense of beauty and spiritual validity running together in one aesthetic illumination." Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton*, eds. N. Burton, Hart and J. Laughlin (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1968), 233-34.

[33] Might it be that they are *self-evident* for the very reason that I don't choose to give them any thought? See Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 27.

[34] Perhaps in this case the "familiar" (from the Latin, *familia*, "household") is actually deepened to reverberate with the tenor of intimacy proper to the family group, making the unfamiliarly familiar *true* "familiarity."

[35] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 353-54.

[36] Heidegger, ibid., 350. Heidegger's evocative image of being drawn, pulled by the withdrawal of migratory birds finds lovely expression in the following (Tadao Ichiki, *Suggestive Brevity: Haiku into the World* [Kyoto: Beiseisha Co., Ltd., 1985], 20.):

> The darkening sea,
> The cries of wild ducks –
> Faintly white!

[37] In a similar vein, Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, notes that "Must is the emphatic form of what is so, the same emphatic form as occurs in wonder. What I discover in wonder is not so, but must be so" (142). Levinas situates all ethics at the phenomenological moment of encountering the face of the "Other." In this encounter, we are immediately present with and to the Other, and are called to respond in a general, not a particular, sense, since we are encountering the Other as an ontological presence: *"The existing of this being*, irreducible to phenomenality understood as a reality without reality, is effectuated in the non-postponable urgency with which he requires a response. This response differs from the 'reaction' that the given gives rise to in that it cannot remain 'between us,' as is the case with the steps I take with regard to a thing. Everything that takes place here 'between us' concerns everyone, the face that looks at it places itself in the full light of the public order" (*Totality and Infinity*, 212).

[38] Or what Buddhists refer to as "suchness" (*tathatā*); Verhoeven employs the term "thusness."

[39] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 63

[40] Or, speaking of wonder as "being suspended between question and answer," Verhoeven declares, "Wonder halts the question at a frontier that it will never be able to pass in the form of a definitive answer. It prevents the answer from bogging down in dogmatic certitude and phraseology" (ibid., 111).

[41] Perhaps any ethics which spring from wonder would *begin*, at least, with a respectful call to "*let* be."

[42] From the *Ninth Duino Elegy*: S. Mitchell, trans., *The Selected Poetry of Rainer Maria Rilke* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 199.

[43] Roland Barthes, *Empire of Signs*, trans. R. Howard (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, Inc., 1982), 72.

[44] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 13.

[45] Ibid., 12.

[46] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 387. In a similar vein, Verhoeven notes: "The heart is the center of an inner life in which experiences are absorbed and from which contact with the world is made. Anything that touches the heart is real and true and involves me completely. The heart is the self in its openness" (120).

[47] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 93.

[48] Calvino, *Mr. Palomar*, 55.

[49] Ibid., 121-22.

[50] Ibid., 126.

[51] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 358.

[52] Cf. Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, "Chaos menaces man only insofar as he is afraid. Wonder is a danger to the fearful" (39).

[53] See ibid., 54, 68.

5

WHAT BECOMES OF PHILOSOPHY'S BEGINNING?

It is enough for me to say that if I am rich in anything, it is in perplexities rather than in certainties. A colleague declares from his chair that philosophy is clear and precise understanding; I would define it as that organization of the essential perplexities, of man.[1]

– Jorge Luis Borges

Philosophy is not knowledge; as a form of desire (love) it is more a pathos, a state, than an actual knowing. Plato gives this pathos a name: wonder.[2]

– Cornelius Verhoeven

That our thinking finds it so toilsome to be in this bestowal, or even on the lookout for it, cannot be blamed on the narrowness of contemporary intellect or resistance to unsettling or disruptive news. Rather we may surmise something else: that we know too much and believe too readily ever to feel at home in a questioning which is powerfully experienced. For that we need the ability to wonder at what is simple, and to take up that wonder as our abode.[3]

– Martin Heidegger

The phenomenology of wonder developed in the preceding has with rather broad strokes delineated numerous qualities and consequences of this experience in daily life. Among other things, such a study enables us to become better acquainted with what is and is not wonder. For instance, in the end, we may say that the modest tragedy of Mr. Palomar's life is that he is never drawn by wonder into the living presence of what he so keenly observes and deliberates upon. To introduce this distinction again, he is a man whose "wondering" bears no animate relation to "wonder": none of his wondering, his curious and perplexed thinking, truly responds, reverberates, or as Heidegger terms it, is in *correspondence*,[4] with wonder. For thought to be true "thinking" in this sense, it must perpetually be disturbed and nourished by wonder's deep wake.[5]

And yet, this man's quandary is all quite understandable, normal: for there is an unsettling enigma that lies at the heart of wonder. It seems to offer neither answers to, nor any escape from, the deeply questionable. Accompanied by the attitudes of daily life, where objects conform to their names and the untoward seldom *happens*, we have little con-

ceptual room for that unique species of perplexity which wonder exposes. Does wonder stop our thinking or incite it? Is its occurrence a mark of naïveté or maturity? Do we experience wonder towards the familiar or the strange? Is our ignorance dispelled or revealed in wonder? Are questions answered or raised in it? Does wonder preclude language or provide the very conditions on which it is founded? The ambiguity to which we lose ourselves in the face of wonder makes of it a pivot where the "either/or" is a simultaneous, living possibility which equally confounds and provokes understanding, language and identity.[6]

Two examples: When Roland Barthes discovers a lucid, moving profundity situated on the fixed surface of the Photograph (whose germination occurs in the recesses of the *camera obscura*) it is the *punctum* of wonder, as I have identified it, that awakens him to the medium's "evidential power."[7] Yet the conclusion of his inquiries is not the simple appropriation of fresh knowing which yields a return to stable awareness; it succeeds in revealing something *else*:

> Such are the two ways of the Photograph. The choice is mine: to subject its spectacle to the civilized code of perfect illusions, or to confront in it the awakening of intractable reality.[8]

A similar attunement to wonder leads Martin Heidegger to call Heraclitus – known as "the Obscure" since antiquity – "the Lucid,"[9] since he finds in the Heraclitean fragments a thinker likewise sensible to the wonder, the "lighting" (*die Lichtung*), which offers an "unconcealment" (*aletheia*) of Being. But in concluding his meditations Heidegger is compelled – and here again wonder's pivotal nature – to reconfirm the obscurity of the early Greek thinker, since this unconcealment is never complete and, what is more, is ever-withdrawing from view.[10] At the outset, that is, we encounter in wonder an elusive, mobile centre (or what Jerome A. Miller refers to as a "hinge"[11]) wherein the obscure becomes clear and the clear, obscure – repeatedly. Not surprisingly, evidence for the intractability of the double-sided questions wonder provokes can be found in the approaches taken by philosophers towards wonder from the beginning.

Although precise exposition of methodology is not an overriding concern of this work I feel obliged at this juncture – by a kind of (post)modern compunction, seemingly – to acknowledge the unavoidably textured, uneven grounds upon which I will be proceeding. More or less from the initial treatment of Aristotle I will be reading the "text of wonder" with (post)modern eyes and ears, and shall not focus these energies on establishing wonder's relation, say, to the Platonic Forms, or the Athenian citizen's access to

leisure. Although it will be evident in good time, I also need to acknowledge the debt owed to Heidegger in this analysis. It seems quite certain that few thinkers of any period have kept this subject so focal to their inquiries. Indeed, even where not explicit, most or all of the modern contributors to whom I refer (e.g., Arendt, Llewelyn, Sallis, Verhoeven) have been influenced considerably by him. What is more, Heidegger does not concentrate his thinking on Plato but, as is well known, pays considerable attention to pre-Socratic thinkers such as Heraclitus. Owing to these factors, even in my approach to Plato and Aristotle, other voices – some earlier, some much later – will already have been long since under way. Accordingly, a (post)modern indebtedness to Heidegger continues in the exposition below, which is not intended as a systematic history and analysis but, rather, a hermeneutic *gathering* of views: a *re*-spection to balance and inform the *in*-spection undertaken in the preceding chapter. Both are necessary for, if phenomenology keeps hermeneutics honest, hermeneutics keeps phenomenology modest.[12]

From its very inception in the West, the experience of wonder has been afforded some place within the philosophic enterprise. Although it is regarded variously, according to the primary issues to which particular thinkers have been oriented, even the rather selective inquiry into its treatment to which this chapter is devoted will help to establish further its pronounced characteristics, and significance to life. Among other things, this will out of necessity involve further consideration of the movement which urges us from the standstill which wonder initially provokes, to that attentive manner of thinking we call *wondering*. Broadly speaking, the following discussions of wonder in Western philosophy will reveal two approaches to this subject: (1) for the group of selected thinkers from Aristotle to Descartes, whom I treat to varying degrees, wonder's relationship to knowledge is the overriding concern; (2) for Plato and Heidegger, etc., to whom I dedicate more time, it is the precise nature of the beginning which wonder offers to philosophy that receives primary attention.

Wonder and Knowledge

Aristotle

As we shall see, Aristotle's teacher Plato identifies wonder to lie at the beginning of philosophy. We must wait to inquire into what Plato might mean by this, but for Aristotle these "beginnings" are understood in a particular light. In the *Metaphysics* he identifies wonder – and according to Hannah Arendt is the first to do so[13] – with "puzzlement" (*aporien*). He finds in such wonder the rudiments of science insofar as our

awareness of ignorance stimulates disinterested thought, the simple desire to know. Quoting Aristotle:

> For it is owing to their wonder that men both begin and at first began to philosophize; they wondered originally at the obvious difficulties, then advanced little by little and stated difficulties about the greater matters.... And a man who is puzzled and wonders thinks himself ignorant (whence even the lover of myth is in a sense a lover of Wisdom, for the myth is composed of wonders); therefore since they philosophized in order to escape from ignorance, evidently they were pursuing science in order to know, and not for any utilitarian end.[14]

Wonder acquaints us with the questionable features of the natural world. But, finding no opening, or way through, this "aporetic wonder" presents us with a difficulty which needs to be overcome: being opposites, wonder and knowledge cannot co-exist. As a result, one must always move beyond wonder. In this way, throughout Aristotle's treatment we can discern a call to *movement*.

> Yet the acquisition of it ["knowledge of which is wisdom"[15]] must in a sense end in something which is the opposite of our original inquiries. For all men begin, as we said, by wondering that things are as they are, as they do about self-moving marionettes, or about the solstices or the incommensurability of the diagonal of the square with the side; for it seems wonderful to all who have not yet seen the reason, that there is a thing which cannot be measured even by the smallest unit. But we must end in the contrary and, according to the proverb, the better state, as is the case in these instances too when men learn the cause....[16]

The virtue of puzzlement lies in its capacity to arouse inquiring thought. But after being so-awakened, it is this exercise of reason which enables one's advancement to a firm understanding. Reasoning overtakes this initial wonder to discover the character and cause of the perplexity. The "end" of this movement which is to be sought (though only for its own sake) is knowledge. Once it has been gained there can be no return to wonder, which – regarding this perplexity, at least – is finished. Nevertheless, it can be safely presumed that the world offers no end of such wonders to stimulate our desire to know, something made abundantly clear by Aristotle's own inquiries into the natural world.

Curiously, one of the results of Aristotle's treatment is that both wonder and knowledge share in an ending: wonder *comes to* an end; being a "destination," knowledge *is* an end. In this sense, the question, What becomes of philosophy's beginning? is answered clearly for Aristotle: just as knowledge allows us to move beyond our puzzlement over the wondrous events in myth, for instance, so it is with wonder in general: we leave it behind; we move on. Or, as John Sallis explains, for Aristotle wonder "does not belong to the future toward which the pursuit of knowledge moves."[17] Accordingly, although philosophy quite properly ratifies wonder as its inception, for Aristotle wonder is no

longer present in one's "thinking philosophically." Knowledge and wonder are distinct, with knowledge by far the preferable. In brief, when one arrives at an understanding of the causes underlying one's ignorance, in Aristotle's reading, wonder has been *surpassed*.

Aquinas

In his *Summa Theologiae*, Aquinas offers an interesting commentary upon Aristotle's views. Among other things, Aquinas' observations should alert us to the connotative richness within which "wonder" can be understood. Note that from "wonder" and Aristotle's "puzzlement," we now encounter "amazement" and even "stupor":

> What laziness is to outward behavior, amazement and stupor are to mental effort.
>
> One who is amazed refrains for the moment to pass judgement on the object of his amazement, fearing failure. But he does look towards the future. When stupor envelops a man he is afraid either to form a judgement here and now or to look towards the future. Hence amazement is a source of philosophizing, whereas stupor is an obstacle to philosophical thinking.[18]

Clearly the fear which characterizes stupor, for Aquinas, is an impediment to the motion needed to achieve the desired end: coming to know. In a similar vein, Verhoeven speaks at some length of "bewilderment" as a form of *panic*, derived from the god Pan, observing that "[p]anic is actually the moment of desperation that precedes flight."[19] That is, movement, but no "progress" – the arresting crisis of bewilderment spurs one simply to get away. In any case, Aquinas' discussion of the fearful rejection of stupor would appear to signify something other than Aristotle's "puzzled" wonder. Amazement, which in this reading is more promising as a constituent of philosophising, comes nearer to Aristotle's concern. Then again, because Aquinas does not offer a sense of the kinds of experience which elicit an amazed response, it is not entirely clear on the basis of this passage that Aquinas' "amazement" is a perplexity of the sort which Aristotle discusses. For instance, it is uncertain, as a result, whether such amazement comes to an end in the same way, or whether it might (to continue the metaphor of movement) "accompany" thinking in its pursuit of knowledge.

It is noteworthy that, among other things, an important differentiation is beginning to be required, as our lexicon of words adhering, or having some relation, to "wonder" increases. With Aquinas, as with Aristotle, it is the advancement towards knowledge which takes precedence. But notice that we have here an assessment of the consequences of that "standstill" which, in the preceding chapter, wonder has been discovered to provoke. As we have seen, several dimensions may be identified to characterise, and reso-

nate within, the phenomenon of wonder; what these thinkers provide are some of the philosophical consequences of one, or the other.[20]

Descartes

Descartes' important examination of wonder is contained in his last work, *The Passions of the Soul* (hereafter: PS),[21] in which he proposes a rigorous analysis of various experiences issuing from the brain and body. By "passion" he means "ideas caused by the body" and in the case of "passions of the soul": *emotion*.[22] His interest in this work is to explicate the constitution, utility and harm of experiences ranging from joy to scorn, from indignation to irresolution.[23]

In order to accomplish the degree of clarity he seeks about the subject of wonder, and the other passions, Descartes deliberately divorces himself from the assertions of the thinkers of antiquity, whose work on the subject he regarded as both "meagre" and "implausible" (PS 328). A new approach is being sought. The scientific precision for which Descartes aims is evident in his physiological account of surprise and the "stand-still" wonder can elicit:

> This element of surprise causes the spirits in the cavities of the brain to make their way to the place where the impression of the object of wonder is located. It has so much power to do this that sometimes it drives all the spirits there, and makes them so wholly occupied with the preservation of this impression that none of them pass thence into the muscles or even depart from the tracks they originally followed in the brain. As a result the whole body remains immobile as a statue, making it possible for only one side of the object originally presented to be perceived, and hence impossible for a more detailed knowledge of the object to be acquired. (PS 354)

For Descartes, wonder is "a sudden surprise of the soul which brings it to consider with attention the objects that seem to it unusual and extraordinary" (PS 353). Its unique force as a passion is owing to the surprise we experience at its very inception, in contrast to emotions which gain strength over time. This force makes an impression on our memory which, in turn, contributes to wonder's value: it aids our coming to understand things of which we are ignorant.

Wonder consists *only* of "knowledge of the thing that we wonder at" (PS 350); that is, pure wonder is free from any preference or moral judgment regarding its object.[24] As such, he considered it the first of all the passions of the soul (ibid.), and, not being an experience coloured by any other, to be one of the six "primitive" passions (along with love, hatred, desire, joy and sadness) (PS 353). In addition, wonder is often present in and influences other passions; its presence is felt, presumably, in the surprising sudden-

ness with which gratitude or jealousy, for instance, can come upon us. Drawing upon these insights, the following is Descartes' definitive statement, in this text, on wonder's unique nature and merits:

> Of wonder, in particular, we may say that it is useful in that it makes us learn and retain in our memory things of which we were previously ignorant. For we wonder only at what appears to us unusual and extraordinary; and something can appear so only because we have been ignorant of it, or perhaps because it differs from things we have known.... The other passions may serve to make us take note of things which appear good or evil, but we feel only wonder at things which merely appear unusual. So we see that people who are not inclined to wonder are usually very ignorant. (*PS* 354-55)

Since wonder only arises in relation to the unusual or extraordinary, the knowledge that arises as a consequence is "new." Wonder is therefore instrumental in such progress towards understanding. But how does it "make" us learn? Here, it seems, we return to the unique "strength" of this passion: the unusual has been *impressed* upon our minds; now reason has, as Descartes might say, a "clear and distinct perception" to consider. The other passions are also in play, but since they do not pertain to the *extra*-ordinary any knowledge ensuing from them is presumably an addition to, or refinement of one's understanding. Thus, it may be inferred that only wonder can begin the movement away from that of which one is formally ignorant.

Thus, Descartes' exacting treatment of this "passion" continues to stress wonder's instrumental role in the acquisition of knowledge. Any answer to the question, What becomes of philosophy's beginning? will hinge in part on what this "beginning" begins. Like Aristotle before him, Descartes is most concerned to know. Absent, seemingly – as it was for Aristotle – is the lucid Socratic apprehension of one's ignorance as the only certainty, but to be fair, this seems to have an almost singular claim within Western thinking. The certain knowledge Descartes seeks is that which dispels ignorance,[25] and in this he is preceded and followed by all philosophers. What wonder stimulates is this movement towards firm understanding. Once begun, it is the charge of the intellect to reason out what has been impressed by this passion upon the reasoning mind.

Although in Descartes' reading wonder is of unique value, attention can also be drawn to the fact that some of his analysis is cautionary, double-edged. For instance, such an "excess of wonder" as is described in the first quotation from *Passions*, above (which he calls "astonishment"), "can never be otherwise than bad" (*PS* 354). No knowledge can ever result from so rapt an attention. Descartes' caution also extends to the ardent pursuit of the unusual for its own sake. Although it is admitted that the frequency or force

of this "emotion" tends to wane with age, as we become increasingly less inclined to find things extraordinary or surprising, a habitual, "blind curiosity" is evident in some people (*PS* 354-56). Such a habit, which appears to lead to credulity, is antithetical to the achievement of understanding, "[f]or gradually they become so full of wonder that things of no importance are no less apt to arrest their attention than those whose investigation is more useful" (*PS* 356). In addition, the following quotation seemingly invites one to conclude that wonder may not in every case be necessary as the beginning to our coming to know.

> But when something previously unknown to us comes before our intellect or our senses for the first time, this does not make us retain it in our memory unless our idea of it is strengthened in our brain by some passion, *or perhaps also by an application of our intellect as fixed by our will in a special state of attention and reflection.* (*PS* 355, emphasis added)

Even though a passion is (normally?) needed to bring some unknown experience to our attention, he does appear to allow (the juncture: "or, perhaps also...") for this to be accomplished solely by the intellect. This makes it possible to ask whether Descartes' analytic scrutiny might not extend so far as to conceive of wonder's superfluity *even* as to the "beginning" itself.

Naturally, the possibility that it does should not blind us to the fact that our questions need not have been his. That he may regard wonder's role in thinking to be superceded in some instances is consistent with his overriding concern that clarity surrounding this and the other passions be developed. And, even if the "movement" – the value of advancing from ignorance to knowledge – which was discerned in Aristotle can be found in Descartes as well, his careful treatment can hardly be regarded as "impatient." As with Aristotle and Aquinas, throughout his analysis Descartes seeks to achieve a clarity which is in the ultimate service of identifying wonder's function in our coming to know.

Wonder as Beginning

The preceding account of these thinkers' understandings of wonder reveals a decided and understandable leaning towards the value of knowledge in human life, the gaining of which philosophy generally takes as its chief aim. In the turn which Nietzsche so strikingly foresaw and articulated, the very motivation to acquire certain knowledge becomes suspect. In *The Gay Science* he expounds upon the motives underlying this quest which is so often encountered or suggested in the preceding:

> Look, isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual, and questionable, something

> that no longer disturbs us? And is the jubilation of those who attain knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of a sense of security?[26]

But while the tendency towards knowledge can bear a likeness to our pronounced need to experience ourselves and the world as stable and secure, such formulations as I have gathered here need not be discounted for this. It might even be asked whether the certainty with which Nietzsche seems able to issue this pronouncement might be questioned using its own logic. Far more importantly, of course, a fundamental rift is being delineated here, between those who would seek increasingly clear, indubitable understandings of what can be known, and those whose utterances shake our confidence in the very moorings to which we assume such knowledge is secured. If anything, this contest (to which we owe so much, being its progeny) is only more evident in our times. In any case, these inquiries now make a turn of their own by moving to Plato and Heidegger, as thinkers for whom it is wonder's singular capacity to *begin* philosophy that defines its principal issue.

Plato

The priority of wonder to the enterprise of Western philosophy is explicitly established near to the beginning of the Greek tradition during Socrates' questioning of the young Theaetetus, in the dialogue of the same name. The early part of their discussion centres on the nature of knowledge, resemblance and what makes anything what it is, that is: *identity*. The keen-witted Theaetetus (who bears a conspicuous resemblance to Socrates[27]) observes that such problems[28] make him "wonder" and admits that he sometimes gets "quite dizzy with thinking of them."[29] To this, Socrates remarks:

> This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin, and he was a good genealogist who made Iris the daughter of Thaumas.[30]

Even though I have hinted at the remark's significance to these investigations it is easy, nonetheless, to be struck by its brevity, here. But that is it: while it is true that "intimations" of wonder occur elsewhere in Plato,[31] in the absence of this statement, the other, scattered and varied references would certainly be less consequential.

Some etymological commentary will be useful. To take the latter part of the statement first, in another dialogue, the *Cratylus*, Plato derives *Iris* (the "rainbow") from the verb "to speak" (*eirein*);[32] *Thaumas* is the "wonderer," related to *thaumazein*: "wonder."[33] In this way, in John Sallis' lively reading, just as the rainbow opens and discloses the arching space between heaven and earth, so too,

> philosophy, beginning in the discourse of wonder, opens up the space between that which appears to sense and that which is said (that is, set forth in and through discourse).[34]

But what of this wonder itself, which (unless we had already felt it "gathering" in this dialogue[35]) figures so *abruptly* in the *Theaetetus*, as something almost "out of order"?[36] From Arendt we learn that when Theaetetus first speaks of it, he uses "wonder" (here: *thaumo*) in the "ordinary sense of being 'puzzled.'"[37] By employing the word *thaumazein* in Socrates' response to the young man, Plato deepens and transforms this initial meaning. Arendt then traces *thaumazein* back to Homer, for whom it was the natural response produced in people at the sudden appearance of a divinity. As a result of this rich and varied genealogy Arendt stresses that "[t]he wonder that is the starting-point of thinking is neither puzzlement nor surprise nor perplexity; it is *admiring* wonder."[38] Arendt's reference to "admiration" here is significant since it carries on a tradition of connotative variability in relation to wonder (as "puzzlement," "stupor," etc.) which has been evident throughout these inquiries. We will return shortly to the question of what this might signify – the *nature* of this "admiration" – but at this juncture it is valuable to note that the *beginning* in question is of a particular variety.

The question of beginning has brought me to a stop in these inquiries before now; I will not begin them again. However the distinction to observe here is a simple yet crucial one. For, whereas we often consider a beginning to be abandoned out of necessity, the beginning which wonder provides is different. Heidegger stresses the original import of the Greek verb for "begin" (*arche*), in this context. Rather than being an initial step that is simply left behind in one's advancement, wonder continues to "govern" that which it has begun.[39] Using "astonishment" (*Erstaunen*) for wonder, here, he offers a vivid summary of this distinction:

> The *pathos* of astonishment thus does not simply stand at the beginning of philosophy as, for example, the washing of his hands precedes the surgeon's operation. Astonishment carries and pervades philosophy.[40]

In this view, wonder can never be superfluous to philosophic thinking. So begun, philosophy must maintain a "creative fidelity"[41] to the wonder which incites and informs it; in a manner of speaking, wonder continually sustains philosophy with a *method*.[42]

Heidegger

In its own way, Heidegger's analysis of wonder is as rigorous as Descartes'. But instead of explicating wonder in order to situate it within the mechanism by which we arrive at knowledge, Heidegger seeks a phenomenological account which distinguishes its indi-

vidual characteristics, and so, its essence.[43] Remaining faithful to the conception of wonder as that which both truly begins and determines philosophy, such a systematic revelation of wonder's *nature* is developed in order to continually sustain one's approach to and inquiry into philosophy's subjects and aims. His can be interpreted as a struggle not so much to write *about* wonder as from *within* it, or on its very verge; rather than merely venturing to clarify this subject as one among many, that is, we encounter a thinker whose alternately obscure and pellucid writing tends to carry with it the disturbance of wonder itself. And it can be noted, as John Sallis observes, that this is a manner of questioning wholly appropriate to wonder, for,

> The operation of wonder belongs to the very condition of the question "What is wonder?"; and one will never be able simply to disengage that question from the wonder about which it would ask.[44]

Although wonder is afforded a notable significance in many of Heidegger's writings, I draw the bulk of the following from the *Basic Questions of Philosophy* (hereafter: *BQ*), which contains his most extended reflections on the subject. Heidegger begins by examining the most "ordinary" of the experiences associated with wonder in order to "dispel" (*BQ* 141) them from our understanding of wonder at its most *essential*. They are: amazement/marvelling, admiration and astonishment.

Considering the subjects in their order of presentation, "marvelling" (*Verwunderung* or *Sichwunderung*[45]) and "amazement" (*Bestaunen*) pertain to what is wondrous, that which is uncommon and surprising. In a sense, we become amazed at what elicits marvel. It would seem that amazement refers to much the same thing that "wonder" as a whole did for Aristotle: a puzzlement or sustained inexplicability. The object of amazement is not merely unusual – it is "extraordinary" (*BQ* 136-37), beyond comprehension. Such is the novelty of these experiences that one may crave them, an observation reminiscent of Descartes. As distinct from the excited curiosity found in marvelling and amazement, "admiration" (*Bewunderung*) is provoked by the unusual which is recognised *as* unusual (*BQ* 142). Think, here, back to Arendt's reference to Homer, wherein, confronted with the sudden appearance of a god, admiration is provoked of one:

> The goddess standing beside Peleus' son caught him by the fair hair,
> appearing to him only, for no man of the others saw her.
> Achilleus in amazement turned about, and straightway
> knew Pallas Athene and the terrible eyes shining.[46]

Admiration evaluates something or someone to be utterly distinct from the usual. Heidegger, however, extends "admiration" beyond this sense. For him, since evaluation

entails self-awareness there is a comparative, even somewhat patronising element present in this experience.[47] In "astonishment" (*Erstaunen*) or awe, on the other hand, no such position *vis à vis* the object is taken. Instead, rather like Aquinas' understanding of amazement and, perhaps, stupor, in the thrall of astonishment the person retracts in the face of an awesome presence which *exceeds* him or her (*BQ* 143).

In neither this astonishment nor the other phenomena described does the "beginning of genuine thinking"(ibid.) occur, since in each case one is struck (in one or other manner) by some *particular* object as being the opposite of the usual. In this way, none of these experiences encounters the unusualness of the *usual*, which for Heidegger is the domain of wonder when understood as the "essence" of *thaumazein* (ibid.). Turning now to wonder in its most essential sense, ontological wonder (hyphenated: *Er-staunen*), I will organise his points[48] into four general themes which inquire into (1) its essential referent, (2) its character of "between-ness," (3) its provocative agency, and (4) the relation of wonder to method.

The (Un)usual

As has been suggested, rather than wonder being experienced as inexplicable, novel, awesome, etc., due to its being set *apart* from the usual, at its most essential wonder erupts in the *heart* of what is familiar, "usual": that in and by which we live, that which is given, is seen to be *unusual*. Boelen has articulated this contrast: "The sensational dulls the sense of wonder; whereas in wonder the sensational loses its fascination and man wonders at things usual which our everyday existence takes for granted."[49] Heidegger understands wonder to confront us with the unusual in the very middle of our lives. A further point of importance pertains to the *scope* of ontological wonder. To contrast wonder once more with the marvellous, and so on: whereas these experiences are of a particular object (an exciting or astonishing *thing* that is explicitly distinguished from the familiar) "essential" wonder arises in regards to *everything* (*BQ* 144) – the fact that it *is* as it is.[50]

Heidegger is not referring to a generality, here, as in "all beings taken together," nor to a monistic effacement of particularity. Instead, in consonance with Heraclitus' observation that "the essence of things likes to hide,"[51] for Heidegger it is the "*Being* of beings" which is normally hidden and becomes revealed in wonder. In this way, Being's nature is only evident in the illuminating crack of wonder, experienced towards the things or beings of which our lives are comprised. It is the character of wonder, that is, to accom-

plish what he calls its "unconcealment" (*aletheia*)[52] of this habitually concealed Being of beings.[53]

Between-ness

Next, our seemingly paradoxical exposure to the Being of beings places us in a pivotal "between" state. At its most extreme no escape is possible from wonder, since, where no *thing* in particular, but the nature of "everything and anything"(*BQ* 150) in its entirety, is in question, reasoning lacks any finite object to grasp or resolve. Conversely, in the absence of something fixed for the mind to apprehend and comprehend, wonder also "knows no way *into* the unusualness of the most usual" (*BQ* 144-45; emphasis added). (Neither out of nor into: where does this leave us?) This between-ness is not a "passive" state, conventionally understood, but an opening wherein the unusual is not the opposite of the usual, set apart from it, but precisely the usual *as itself*. It is the nature of wonder to reveal, open up, or to "liberate this between as the between" (*BQ* 145). All of which returns us to our preceding theme, since, far from wonder exposing us to what is merely surprising, the usual is experienced, as it were, *in extremis*. So it is that, reflecting on the questions to which philosophy is persistently drawn, Hans-Georg Gadamer speaks of wonder as an encounter with the "strange."[54] Simultaneously luminous and obscure, the between-ness to which life is exposed in wonder presents us with an epistemological paradox: what can be "known"? Miller offers that

> The given is indispensable, not because it gives us something without which we cannot know but rather for just the opposite reasons: we must be given the given so that we can realize that, even in the plenitude of its complete givenness, it does not give us knowledge of what it is.[55]

That is, we come again to a *movement* in regards to wonder. For the thinkers considered earlier, with their orientation upon the issue of how knowledge is arrived at, wonder may be seen as a necessary *impulse*. It gets one *going*. For Heidegger, however, being more acutely attentive to wonder-as-beginning, a peculiar movement is discerned within the depths of wonder itself. "The totality shows itself only in its *becoming*,"[56] remarks Heidegger – in its very immediacy, that is, the Being of beings is ever *withdrawing*.

Wonder's Agency

The third theme that deserves emphasis is the fact that in wonder we are "disposed" or "displaced." In the movement initiated by ontological wonder we become disposed towards or caught up in the irresolvable fact that things are as they are.[57] As Heidegger concisely observes:

> In wonder, something unusual is not set off against the usual, but instead wonder sets *us* before the usual itself precisely as what is the most unusual. (*BQ* 150)

While we have by now become acquainted with the pivotal state of being alive to the "(un)usual," it is the implicit *agency* of wonder that is of concern here. Heidegger conceives of our active disposition in wonder in dynamic terms:

> We sometimes say that we have been transported *into* this or that disposition. In truth, i.e., understood on the basis of the original essence of Being, it is rather the reverse: it is the disposition that transports, transports us into this or that basic relation to beings as such. (*BQ* 134)

What this urges us to acknowledge is "where" the real agency of philosophic inquiry lies. To repeat: philosophy begins in and is sustained by wonder – it does not begin, for instance, in one's *determination* that philosophy be sustained by wonder, or one's *desire* to experience wonder in order that philosophy might begin, and so on. Rather, wonder is the experience of our being caught and held, constrained, before the (un)usual; it is a basic disposition which cannot be willed (*BQ* 147) but whose agency informs *us*.

This engaging disposition which is wonder instills in us a necessity or compelling logic all its own: the necessity which the "basic disposition compels, the thoughtful questioning of beings as such, is essentially suffering [*Leiden*]" (*BQ* 151). To understand this more adequately it is helpful to return briefly to "what" it is that is stimulated by the wonder of which Plato initially spoke. As we have seen, Plato writes that this "sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher." The word translated as "sense" here, *páthos*, can be rendered "state," but more tellingly (and as Descartes has termed it), as "passion." Passions are what they are because, while in their midst we are being *acted upon* – using an ancient usage, that is, they are states which we "suffer."[58] Heidegger extends this by stressing the relation of *páthos* to the verb *paschein*, to "endure, undergo, to be borne along by, to be determined by."[59] However, by "suffering" Heidegger is connoting not an inactive submission but a "creative tolerance for the unconditioned" (ibid.) borne of one's acceptance of the consequences of dwelling in the face of wonder. Nevertheless, like it or not such suffering makes patients of us all, creatively "passive" recipients of this passion. The compelling disposition of wonder, in other words, *happens* to us.

What is more, the agency of wonder which incites this suffering marks the beginning of philosophy insofar as it provokes philosophical thinking, or: *wondering*. In Chapter Four I insisted on excluding the verbal forms, "to wonder," "wondering," from my phenomenological treatment since in contemporary usage they seldom draw very generously upon the essential wonder with which we are chiefly occupied: "She's wondering

where to put her book," or, "He wonders which shoes to wear to the movie," or, being polite, "I wonder if I might borrow your pen?" However, we come now to the activity of true wondering, as what might be called our "creative acquiescence" to having become disposed by wonder. Heidegger declares that, "[w]ondering man is the one *moved* by wonder, i.e., displaced by this basic disposition into an essence determined by it" (*BQ* 146). For him, wondering in this sense is a "productive seeing" (ibid.) which sustains our participation in the unconcealment that wonder has illuminated. "To wonder," therefore, may be understood as an active participation in *that* with which wonder has imbued our attention. As Heidegger notes,

> thoughtful questioning is not the intrusive and rash curiosity of the search for explanations; it is the tolerating and sustaining of the unexplainable as such, despite being overwhelmed by the pressure of what reveals itself. (*BQ* 148-49)

As was observed in the preceding chapter, curiosity, as an avid expression of our desire to know, exceeds the gentle, lively interest that wonder spawns. Wondering is a manner of thinking which does not overstep that which wonder reveals. Among other things, that is, *wondering is patient*.

Wonder and Method

> *The world is not what I think but what I live through.*[60]
>
> – Maurice Merleau-Ponty

With philosophical thinking now begun, we are led to consider the issue of the path philosophy is to take once it moves in, or is drawn by, wonder's wake. The fourth theme pertains, therefore, to the question of method, or what Heidegger refers to as *techne*: knowledge, as in "know-how" (*BQ* 154). But before continuing, a clarification. No "method" or technique is being proposed for wonder, *thaumazein*, itself, which lies outside of – is logically *prior* to – the intentional or ardent reach of will. Instead, where such questions come into play our focus is on *wondering*. In view of this distinction Heidegger effectively defines the *techne* of wondering as follows: "The sustaining of the compelling basic disposition, as the carrying out of the necessity, is a suffering..., and that is the essence of thoughtful questioning" (*BQ* 153). Likewise, Boelen has provided a valuable sense of the way in which wonder and philosophical thinking ideally interact:

> philosophical re-flection, far from leading us *away from* primordial wonder brings us back *into it*. Philosophical wonder *does not replace* primordial wonder but *mediates* it.[61]

For Heidegger, genuine thinking is alive whenever one is able to remain attentive to the unique *páthos* which wonder has incited: "In such suffering there occurs a correspon-

dence to what has to be grasped, while the one who grasps is transformed according to it" (*BQ* 153). Here, philosophy is not a procedure by which puzzles are solved or thoughts brought to their logical conclusions. It can be observed that the necessary "movement" from ignorance to knowledge repeatedly implied in earlier inquiries has in the present instance been quelled. Not that wonder for Heidegger is a stasis. It possesses an undeniable agency, after all. But the assumption of "progress," where movement advances irrevocably *away* from its beginnings, has now given way to what might be termed a "creative *em*-pathy" in which sustained attention is given to the incipient opening that has impelled one's thinking. Such attentive wondering is both patient and modest. This is due to philosophy's unique nature as an activity which, perpetually sustained by its beginnings, does not strive for a *de*-termination in which wonder's utility or nature has been surpassed.

There is, in addition, a more dynamic element to this method or *techne*. It accords with the essence of philosophy being, as Verhoeven has argued, "the radicalization of wonder,"[62] and involves an effort to *remain* open to the "holding sway" (*BQ* 155) of wonder's unconcealment. As these investigations are drawn to a close, Merleau-Ponty returns us to the beginnings and offers a revealing encapsulation of this method:

> With them [the Greeks], for the first time, and definitively, philosophy is the quest that brings to light all the presuppositions of life and knowledge, the desire for an unconditioned knowledge, absolute transparency. The philosopher is defined by the distance he takes from the world, society, and himself as an empirical entity.
>
> What is more, they went so far as to understand that the extreme point of that kind of reflection is the rediscovery of the abrupt upsurge of being prior to reflection, and that radical knowing rediscovers unknowing. The philosopher is therefore not only the one who cuts himself off and returns to himself. The distance he places between himself and the too familiar world of things that are taken for granted is but the means of a greater attentiveness; *the doubt cast upon "beings"* is but the revelation of "Being." They not only dreamed of an absolute knowledge, they understood that the absolute inhabits the "relative."[63]

Under such attentive (and wonderfully immodest) beginnings as these, where a conscious distancing results in deeper engagement and a methodical "doubting" of our categorical appraisals of experience opens up the life-world in a fuller and more essential manner, philosophy is not being rendered into a rationally coherent method. Or, in any case, whatever method or *techne* wonder elicits will be profoundly "un-methodical."

While actively disposed within this unmethodical method, the opening to which the process of philosophical thinking reverberates is perpetually vulnerable to closure. According to Heidegger, the "danger of its disturbance and destruction" (*BQ* 155) lies

within it. As we have repeatedly seen, in this reading philosophy continues as an activity insofar as it is sustained by wonder. In Heidegger's terms, what is thereby continued is the unconcealedness of the usual *as* the unusual. However, he stresses that the process is easily disturbed when, we might say, the method becomes overtaken by a *project* which is no longer consonant with its own governing principle.

> All philosophical thinking which explicitly or inexplicitly follows the call "to the thing itself" is already admitted into the free space of the opening in its movement and with its method. But philosophy knows nothing of the opening. Philosophy does speak about the light of reason, but it does not heed the opening of Being.[64]

All too often, for Heidegger, in place of philosophical thinking there arises the desire for "learning and calculation" (ibid.). In such cases wondering or philosophical thinking have become *instrumental*. This makes of wondering in its "genuine" sense a unique activity which seeks no ends – in particular, even the desire for knowledge is necessarily absent. Free from even such aims authentic philosophical thinking is an activity which is constantly enduring the probability of its own demise, wherein the ideas which emerge out of the method itself contribute to the loss of the basic unconcealment wonder has initially granted. As Heidegger concludes, "[i]n this way, the beginning contains in itself the unavoidable necessity that, in unfolding, it must surrender its originality" (*BQ* 156). In a seemingly inevitable moment, the appeal of ideas has overstepped the priority of wonder, and thinking has become a process of conceptual elaboration.

The Stop

The "gathering" of ideas undertaken here to add a critical dimension to the my earlier phenomenological examinations is nearly concluded. The two categories under which I have discussed wonder do not so much expose disagreements as illustrate differing orientations and preoccupations. Several insights found in Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, and Descartes are confirmed and dilated upon in Heidegger, whose foremost contribution, in some sense, is to have devoted such sustained thought to this subject. As selective as this investigation has been it reveals many generative ideas and attitudes with which wonder is associated. To reiterate some of these here:

1) The surprise which announces wonder's presence exposes our ignorance and stimulates reasoning.

2) It is the impulse behind our achieving understanding, and so, is the beginning of philosophy: inciting, imbuing and sustaining all profound reflection upon life.

3) At its most remarkable it confronts us with the usual as unusual.

4) As a passion, it possesses a fecund agency which is alternately compelling, disturbing, illuminating and perplexing.

5) No method for being so-disposed can be prescribed, since, within wonder desire is silent.

6) Wondering, too, is vulnerable to the disturbances of urgent or instrumental thinking.

However intelligible each of these points may be, however much they may add to what we once knew about wonder, they cannot hide the curious obscurity which continues to gather about and cling to this phenomenon. My concluding reflections bear upon a pair of observations whose presence(s) has been more or less implicit in the foregoing. The first, which is introduced only now: *a hermeneutic of location*; the second, which has appeared often: *a hermeneutic of movement*.

For reasons of my nature, or wonder's – perhaps both – when speaking of this experience I am accustomed to think in terms of seeing *into* things, *beneath* their surfaces. When such clarity is unavailable, I may reflect on the *depths* of uncertainty which dwell in the *heart* of experience. That these matters are profound, that "truth" lies below appearances and that this profundity bears an affinity to our own depths, are revealed in discourse to be common enough presuppositions. "Location," here, is not some place foreign, uncharted, but somewhere presently unavailable. In a similar vein, it is often observed in relation to religious views that a dualism of intelligent spirit and brute matter, of spiritually vibrant and mundane life, is an inevitable byproduct of any emphasis on salvation and other-worldly verities. As with religious dualism, here, as well, two sites are identified: one to be ignored or surpassed, the other to be affirmed and attained. A hermeneutic of location, which echoes powerfully in the work of Heidegger (in spite of the perpetual withdrawal of Being), for instance, can sound like a call to find the reality which is situated underneath the evident, superficial face of things (beings).

In such cases it seems that a certain tenor of valuing the "profound" in life may incline us to an impartial or inattentive attitude towards the surface textures to which all of our senses are, in fact, attuned. What, then, are we to make of the entities around and in the midst of which – and with whom – we live? As a beginning, perhaps we need to remember (here again: echoes of Mr. Palomar) that the surface of things, too, is inexhaustible, and what is more, that the profundity of wonder is often revealed to dwell

upon this very surface.[65] Wonder reveals things to be not otherwise than they are, but otherwise than we expect. "Finding" them in the midst of appearances is therefore simply to look upon or dwell with them wonderingly. (But how is *this* done?)

Then again, I have frequently been drawn in these inquiries to consider a hermeneutic of movement. This is especially evident in the philosophical vocation to advance beyond ignorance to knowledge, to move away from the perplexing to the certain, and so on. But the emphasis on the sustained beginning of wonder presents us with an enigma, of sorts. "Enigma," because, while coming to understand that the antithetical nature of the movement of thought which seeks ends in advance of itself suggests that wonder must, therefore, be a stillness (confirmed in the arresting "standstill" of wonder), we also see a provocative agency and *dis*-position alive in wonder which belies this view. We are offered no consolations, no firm support for standing, where these deep uncertainties are at work. Confirmation for which is given by the fact that even "philosophy" contains no methodologically secure grounds for proceeding. How is it all to begin? where is all this ceaseless movement to end?

It is helpful to inquire into the agency which underlies this movement. For instance, as much as we *seek* novelty we are uncomfortable within wonder's abrupt breach of the familiar and routine. But then, wonder arrives unbidden and its movements lie, in Luce Irigaray's admirable words, "beyond the necessities of the heart."[66] That is, whereas we *desire* changes to the mundane (knowledge where we lack it, for example) we are *confronted* without warning with the pivotal disclosure of the (un)usual, where thinking is both impossible and urged upon us. Being a passion, an ordeal, something unwilled which we passively, creatively experience, is it any wonder that we find ourselves so unclear about this suffering in its most lucid form? Another way of conceiving of the enigma of movement is to recall my earlier discussion of wonder's "discontinuity." David Appelbaum makes reference to the longstanding pedigree of the "circle" in Western thought as being the perfect symbol of uniform, unimpeded movement. He suggests that this "text of motion" has effectively silenced what he calls "the stop":

> Yet the stop is ubiquitous. The stop is evident in each and every earthbound action we experience: shoveling, hammering, opening a door, using a pen, eating, driving, running, lifting, skating, swimming. All involve a joint. There is a hinge around which events pivot. An initial impetus to movement runs its course and is followed by a new impetus leading to a new movement.[67]

What makes this stop which sustains movement so elusive? In fact, not only in this instance but in each of these hermeneutics a certain discomposure with the *present* is ap-

parent. "Location" in the desire to find something *beneath*, "movement" in the desire to advance *beyond*, our experience of what presently lies before us. In the end, Heidegger claims that the reason for our difficulty in negotiating this terrain lies not with any deficiency of ours which is peculiar to these times,

> Rather we may surmise something else: that we know too much and believe too readily ever to feel at home in a questioning which is powerfully experienced. For that we need the ability to wonder at what is simple, and to take up that wonder as our abode.[68]

Within the eruption of wonder, one's participation in the habitual movement of thought, the continuous surface of experience, endures a marked rupture or crisis. That which we assume, seek or desire is arrested, yet the character of this arrestation is not a stasis but an open, *em*-pathetic attentiveness. The stop which dispatches us to the present, and leaves us with what *is* present, is not a conclusive ending. Rather, it more closely resembles the rest which is situated precisely in the middle of movement, as we find it in the unwilled rhythm and textures which define our *breathing*.

It is to an inquiry into just such a movement and rest that this study now turns. The mindful cultivation of meditative attention resonates strikingly with these last observations of Heidegger. Where a deeply attentive mind rests on what lies in experience, an enlarged capacity for remaining present to this experience is nurtured. The aspirations of desire, and even hope, that we extend (or which extend *us*) beyond or beneath what is present become subdued in favour of simple, bare attention. With attention resting and opening upon the mere surfaces and sensations of experience – with "what is simple" – meditators may experience pronounced, transformative "insights" regarding the nature of this experience. In this way the meditative context raises the issue of wonder in a different setting from the somewhat adventitious experiences described in Chapter Four and the philosophic reflections that have occupied us in the foregoing. What is more, this context raises the possibility of speaking intelligibly of a *method* with which to take up the *abode of wonder*.

NOTES

[1] Jorge Luis Borges, prologue, *Conversations with Jorge Luis Borges*, Richard Burgin (New York: Discus Books, 1970), vii.

[2] Cornelis Verhoeven, *The Philosophy of Wonder*, trans. M. Foran (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 10.

[3] Martin Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, trans. D.F. Krell and F.A. Capuzzi (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1984), 103-04.

[4] Martin Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. J. T. Wilde and W. Kluback (New Haven CT.: College & University Press, 1956), 69ff. Later, he explains, "The correspondence listens to the voice of the appeal. What appeals to us as the voice of Being evokes our correspondence. 'Correspondence' then means: being de-termined, *être disposé*, by that which comes from the Being of being. *Dis-posé* here means literally set-apart, cleared, and thereby placed in relationship with what is. Being as such determines speaking in such a way that language is attuned (*accorder*) to the Being of being. Correspondence is necessary and is always attuned, and not just accidentally and occasionally. It is in an attunement. And only on the basis of the attunement (*disposition*) does the language of correspondence obtain its precision, its tuning" (77).

[5] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, ed. D. F. Krell (New York: Harper San Francisco, 1977): "Once we are so related and drawn to what withdraws, we are drawing into what withdraws, into the enigmatic and therefore mutable nearness of its appeal. Whenever man is properly drawing that way, he is thinking – even though he may still be far away from what withdraws, even though the withdrawal may remain as veiled as ever" (358).

[6] While making reference to the Greek context (and term for wonder) John Llewelyn, "On the Saying that Philosophy Begins in *thaumazein*," in *Post-Structuralist Classics*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (London: Routledge, 1988), offers a vivid expression of this ambiguity: "'Wonder,' *thaumazein*, is one of those wonderful words that face in opposite directions at one and the same time, like Janus and the androgynous creature of whom Aristophanes tells in the *Symposium*. It seems possible to use it in opposite senses at once; *thaumazein* both opens our eyes wide and plunges us into the dark. It is both startled start and flinching in bewilderment" (173).

[7] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. R. Howard (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1981), 106.

[8] Ibid., 119.

[9] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 103.

[10] Ibid., 123.

[11] Jerome A. Miller, "Wonder as Hinge," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 29 (March 1989): 53-66.

[12] Paul Ricoeur, *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, trans. K. Blamey and J.B. Thompson (Evanston IL: Northwestern Univ. Press, 1991), has significantly remarked of their relationship: "On the one hand, hermeneutics is erected on the basis of phenomenology and thus preserves something of the philosophy from which it nevertheless differs: *phenomenology remains the unsurpassable presupposition of hermeneutics*. On the other hand, phenomenology cannot constitute itself without a *hermeneutical presupposition*. The hermeneutical condition of phenomenology is linked to the role of *Auslegung* [explication] in the fulfillment of its philosophical project" (26).

[13]Arendt, *Life of the Mind* , 1: 114.

[14] *Metaphysics*, I. 2. 982b 12-19.

[15] Ibid., 982a 6-7.

[16] Ibid., 983b 13-21.

[17] Sallis, *Double Truth*, 195.

[18] *Summa Theologiae*, I-II, q. 41, a. 4; cited in Llewelyn, "Philosophy Begins in *Thaumazein*," 179.

[19] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 53; see also his discussion, 51-59. In *The Philsophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. (rev. ed. London: The Colonial Press, 1900), G.W.F. Hegel writes of Pan that "he embodied that thrill which pervades us in the silence of the forests; he was therefore especially worshipped in sylvan Arcadia (a 'panic terror' is the common expression for this groundless fright)" (235).

[20] It is worth citing the example of Hegel in brief, here, whose discussion of wonder also appears to take its impetus from Aristotle. John Sallis translates (from: *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften. Dritter: Teil: Die Philosophie des Geistes Werke* [Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1970], 10: 255, in Sallis, *Double Truth*, 195-96): "*Aristotle* refers to its [intuition's] place when he says that all knowledge begins from wonder [Verwunderung]. Initially, the object is still loaded with the form of the irrational, and it is because it is within this that subjective reason as intuition has the certainty, though only the *indeterminate certainty*, of finding itself again, that its subject matter inspires it with wonder and awe. *Philosophical* thought, however, has to raise itself above the standpoint of wonder."

Hegel echoes Aristotle to a degree in this passage. Wonder remains acknowledged as the beginning of philosophy, and continues to be surpassed by the "movement" of reasoning to final knowledge. Even so, a remarkable distinction is present. While still remaining "irrational," wonder is for Hegel related to intuition, and through it gains or is accompanied by a degree of confidence in relation to what is apprehended. Absent, it seems clear, is philosophy's beginning in sheer perplexity, "aporetic wonder," after which the movement towards knowledge is almost a flight. Now, a seed of comprehension (albeit irrational, premature) accompanies the sudden provocation of wonder. Knowledge begins *from* this active state and no longer, as it were, *away* from it. See also: G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree. (rev. ed. London: The Colonial Press, 1900), in which he discusses wonder in relation to the Greek excitement with the "*Natural* in Nature" (234).

For an alternate reflection of Hegel's ideas on wonder see the passage cited in Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 159-60. I would like to make more of the ideas contained in this quotation, but Verhoeven's text offers no reference for Hegel's statement, and as of writing this I have been unable to locate it independently. To summarise, three intellectual stages pertaining to wonder are described. (1) In the first (just as will be seen in Descartes), for a very ignorant person wonder seldom if ever impinges on the daily routine. (2) Conversely, a person who has achieved insight into the underlying reality of things through careful reflection "no longer" wonders. (3) Meanwhile, the one who *still* wonders has a degree of such insight into the nature of the world.

[21] René Descartes, "The Passions of the Soul," in *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, vol. I, ed. J. Cottingham, R. Stoothoff and D. Murdoch, 325-404 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985).

[22] Amélie Oksenberg Rorty, "Descartes on Thinking with the Body," *The Cambridge Companion to Descartes*, ed. J. Cottingham (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1992), 373.

[23] Rorty suggests that Descartes addresses this text to practical questions, such as, "What must the body be like, so that its contribution to thinking is reliable, and perhaps even useful?" (ibid., 371). As she explains, "[b]odily based thought, following the promptings of nature, is necessary to guide the will's determinations in directing a soundly constructed life, since the body not only affects the content, but the sequence and association of perceptual ideas." Ibid., 372.

[24] Luce Irigaray allows this to mean that, "[w]onder goes beyond that which is or is not suitable for us"; in her "Wonder: A Reading of Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*," in *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, trans. Carolyn Burke and Gillian C. Gill (Ithaca NY: Cornell Univ. Press, 1993), 74. However, my understanding of Descartes, here, is that wonder does not so much go beyond as it precedes such judgements; although, perhaps they amount to the same thing, in that wonder is *outside* such judgements.

[25] For Heidegger, Descartes marks the beginning of the modern turn in philosophy, which is directed more towards establishing certainty than dwelling in an "attunement" to what he calls the Being of being. See *What is Philosophy?* 87, 89.

[26] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1974), 300-01, n. 355; cited in David Loy, "Indra's Postmodern Net," *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3 (July 1993): 485.

[27] See Sallis' interesting examination of their similarities in *Double Truth* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), 197-204.

[28] Sallis characterises them as a "mixing-up of opposites," ibid., 203, and notes that in other dialogues, too, it is perplexities of this kind which Socrates uses to provoke thought.

[29] *Theaetetus*, 155c .

[30] Ibid., 155d.

[31] For instance, Llewelyn, "Philosophy Begins in *Thaumazein*,"174-80, finds suggestive references in the *Meno*, *Parmenides* and *Republic*; and Sallis, *Double Truth*, 197-204, offers a thorough examination of the *Theaetetus* itself.

[32] Sallis, *Double Truth*, 202; see also Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 1: 142-44.

[33] After tracing this rich genealogy through Homer and Hesiod (who pairs Thaumas with Electra, "shining," to beget Iris), Sallis, *Double Truth*, interprets the association of wonder and Iris to philosophy as follows: "Yet, the rainbow is not merely a sign sent from heaven to earth but rather is such that in being sent it spans and thus discloses in its openness the very space across which it is sent, that between earth and sky, between the abode of mortals and that reserved for immortal gods. As philosophy, beginning in the discourse of wonder, opens the space between that which appears to sense and that which is said (that is, set forth in and through discourse)" (203).

[34] Ibid.

[35] Ibid., 199; here, he is referring to how wonder seems to collect around the young Theaetetus himself.

[36] Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 1: 141. Bernard J. Boelen, *Existential Thinking: A Philosophical Orientation* (n.p.: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1968), observes: "there, for the first time, in the *Theaetetus*,

without solemnity or ceremony, almost "by the way," though fresh as dawn, appears the thought that have become a commonplace in the history of philosophy" (99).

[37] Arendt, *Life of the Mind*, 1: 142.

[38] Ibid., 143.

[39] Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* 81.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Boelen, *Existential Thinking*, 70.

[42] With, as Boelen explains, this qualification: wonder's beginning, however, is original, unwilled, unforseeable, irreducible, unsystematic, and thus is utterly "non-methodical." See *Existential Thinking*, 71-84.

[43] Heidegger explains his conception of the investigation he undertakes in *Basic Questions of Philosophy*, trans. R. Rojcewicz and A. Schuwer (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1994): "Our analysis – should we want to name it such – is not a dissection in the sense of an explanatory dissolution into a manifold of components. It is simply an attempt at a retrospective sketch of the simplicity and incomprehensibility of that displacement of man, into beings as such, which comes to pass as wonder" (148).

[44] Sallis, *Double Truth*, 205.

[45] German terms used by Heidegger are given by Llewelyn, "Philosophy Begins in *Thaumazein*," 184.

[46] Richmond Lattimore, trans., *The Iliad of Homer* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1951), 64.

[47] "The admirer knows himself – perhaps not in the ability to accomplish things, though indeed in the power to judge them – equal to the one admired, if not even superior" (*BQ* 142).

[48] There are thirteen points in all; they appear in *BQ* 144-56.

[49] Boelen, *Philosophy of Existence*, 50.

[50] Ludwig Wittgenstein's understanding of wonder bears mentioning, here, since it displays both similarities and differences with Heidegger's. John Churchill, "Wonder and the End of Explanation: Wittgenstein and Religious Sensibility." *Philosophical Investigations*. 17, 2 (April 1994), 388-416, identifies two understandings of wonder in Wittgenstein's work. In his earlier period it was the very *fact* of the world's existence which spurred wonder; later he focussed on existence in its particularity, e.g., as evident in multifarious language-games. Important affinity between the these thinkers is evident in view of Wittgenstein's ongoing recognition that "reflection brings us up against the limits of explanation" (399).

[51] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 113.

[52] See *Basic Writings*, 388-89, for his reasoning behind translating *aletheia* as "unconcealment" rather than "truth."

[53] It is for this reason that Heidegger remarks that "Ontology is possible only as phenomenology" (*Basic Writings*, 84).

[54] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Reason in the Age of Science*, trans. F. G. Lawrence (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1981), 145. In *Truth and Method*, 2nd ed. trans. J. Weinsheimer and D.G. Marshall (New York: Crossroad, 1991), Gadamer also writes of "*this in-between*" (i.e., familiarity and strangeness) as constituting the "*true locus of hermeneutics*" (295). Likewise, Heidegger refers to

the fact that, "Only when the strangeness of beings oppresses us does it arouse and evoke wonder" (*Basic Writings*, 111).

[55] Miller, "Wonder as Hinge," 58.

[56] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 380.

[57] Or, as he terms is, "beings as they are, in the play of their Being," (ibid., 146).

[58] It is also here that we seem most nearly to encounter in wonder what already resounds within its etymology – a "wounding": e.g., OE: *wundor/wund*; OHG: *wuntar/wunta*. See the *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "wonder," "wound."

[59] Heidegger, *What is Philosophy?* 83.

[60] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. C. Smith (London: Routledge, 1962), xvi-xvii.

[61] Boelen, *Existential Thinking*, 57.

[62] Verhoeven, *Philosophy of Wonder*, 11.

[63] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Founders of Philosophy," trans. M.B. Smith, in *Texts and Dialogues*, ed. H.J. Silverman and J. Barry Jr. (New Jersey: Humanities Press, 1992), 124. Emphasis added.

[64] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 385-86.

[65] This is nicely treated in an anecdote of Llewelyn's, "Philosophy Begins in *Thaumazein*," which relates how Heraclitus was fond of remarking to visitors that "'The gods are also even here,' here being the humble kitchen where the daily bread is baked" (185).

[66] Irigaray, "Wonder: A Reading of Descartes," 80.

[67] Appelbaum, *The Stop* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), 17.

[68] Heidegger, *Early Greek Thinking*, 103-04.

6

LIVED DIMENSIONS OF MEDITATION RETREATS

Shelley: Can I speak to you?

There is emotion in Shelley's face as she looks straight at me to ask this; her eyes are very bright and these words carry a slight charge which catches me.

We walk out of the room, down the stairs to the "interview room" a short distance along a hall. This is a large room with big windows, a couch and various chairs. She and I sit on identical, square office chairs with bright blue cushions, chrome frame and arm rests. The chairs face each other obliquely and I tuck around in my seat a bit to listen.

Shelley: I wanted to tell you about having an experience of joy. I wasn't really sure if I should tell anyone, and then I decided to tell you because you might understand, but I don't know if I'd want to share this with everyone quite yet. Just before the group walking this morning, at the same moment when the bell was released I was struck by this intense feeling of pure joy. During the meditation itself I don't remember feeling exceptionally concentrated, it seemed rather ordinary. But then when the bell rang I was just struck. It's like the joy you get from looking at a flower sometimes, only here it was like the joy of looking at all the flowers in the world had been concentrated into a single instance.

This has never happened to me before. So powerful and pure: it's like it both infused me and it *is* me at the same time.... At first I didn't want to walk with the group but then I thought that the experience was fleeting and that I shouldn't try to grasp onto it. It is just passing. I wanted to tell someone but wasn't sure I could explain it. The whole world of effort and worries just dissolved. When it first happened I wanted to stand up and shout it out!

I feel so light now. You see, for years I've been meditating regularly at home and nothing like this has ever happened. Nothing led up to it. It was really indescribable... and yet somehow it was just completely what it was.... When I came here this weekend I didn't have any expectations. I just came to do some sitting and walking meditation. This has been so unanticipated... but it also seems very familiar somehow.

The present chapter contains considerable reference to interview material. This opening set of conversations and reflections spans a period of nearly three months, and revolves around a sudden, exhilarating moment experienced by a meditator in a retreat at which I was instructing. Traced over a period of time, the reflections indicate something of the nature of the transformation that can be initiated in these settings, which in this case is both longstanding and somewhat radical in nature – or, as this meditator herself might say, "radical but ordinary." It also indicates how such an experience, which has arisen within the rarefied confines of a retreat setting, can develop or "ripen," and can find its way into the noisy permutations of one's life.

Shelley: *Struck by the ordinary*

> *joy is exactly what's happening, minus our opinion of it....*[1]
>
> – Joko Beck

In the terminology of retreats, Shelley, a mother and health-care specialist in her mid-thirties, has experienced an "insight." The vivid joy has arisen with the bell's sound, as if both she and the bell were simultaneously struck or, as she says, "released." It leaps out of her. Its eruption is recognisable (as "joy"), but utterly unparalleled in its intense force. This joy brings a lightness, where the bodily and spatial dimensions are suddenly experienced to open up. Similarly, her worries have "dissolved," as if the constraining weight of the past has been dropped or lifted from her; any sense of the future seems to be precluded by the animation of the present as-it-is. Juxtaposed to these immediate certainties is the question of others. Its intensity and unprecedented character make of the insight an anomaly, or leave her feeling somewhat anomalous in regards to the other meditators present at the retreat. The vehicle of language has become questionable in the presence of the joy which has overcome her in this way.

Two weeks later I phoned to read her this account of her experience, only to find that the joy which came so suddenly on the last morning of the retreat had not ended there. She listened to what I had written and then said:

Shelley: It's like I've been struck by lightening, the effect it's had on my life. I've lost all sense of the future. Now there's this wonderful sense of living moment by moment. Usually my days would be pretty up and down, but now there's this equanimity; things have lost their intensity.... It's almost as if I'm ready to die, like there's no difference between life and death. I don't feel attached to anything, no grasping or clinging. I still love my family of course but now it's different somehow.

PH: "Equanimity" seems to mean different things to people. Some say that it's really not participating in life fully to have this evenness of mind. But it sounds very different for you, how would you explain it?

Shelley: Well, but it's actually really wonderful, there's an interest in everything but I'm just not attached to one thing over another. I mean, when we talk about going skiing I say that it's going to be terrific, and everything, but I just say those words: it's not like the skiing is really *different* than other things; it's all kind of the same, all good. Everything's so fresh – so much more startling than it was before....

The astonishing character of Shelley's experience of joy now seems to have infused the rest of her life. This is not to say that the joy, in itself, has continued, as much as that its "ring" now resonates throughout the dimensions of her lifeworld. For instance, the future has been displaced by a rich engagement with the present; time does not extend or pull, but rather *situates*, her. The dimension of space is both comfortable – or, after O.F. Bollnow, it has "breadth"[2] – and is *filled* or populated with interest. The relational dimension is a realm of possibility rather than a constraint. Similarly, bodily experience is unencumbered and light; the interest which everything has gained seems almost to *incline* her towards things. In this way all of the "lifeworld existentials"[3] (temporality, spatiality, corporeality, relationality) seem to be ordered by the gravity of the present in her experience. There are curious elements of this narrative. In her present reflections *difference* (even that between life and death) is absent, or subdued. How? Perhaps, since everything is equally "fresh," vivid – full of itself, in a manner of speaking – nothing any longer gains distinction over the other. This is by no means an elimination of the particular, which is apparent in its "startling" character, but an evenness of view in which the register of preference is absent.

A month later, after reading these transcripts (relayed to her while she was attending another retreat) Shelley replied with a remarkable letter. It raises several issues which had been voiced earlier and expresses a deepening ease with the transformations initially wrought by the experience. She also reveals a dimension of the experience which had until then remained hidden in her recollections, a moment so fleeting and subtle it was forgotten in the subsequent brilliance of it all.

> Re-reading the account of my experience at the last retreat made me realize that I had left out one important aspect when I first told you. I did not realize until much later that this was really the essence of the experience. When the bell sparked the explosion or release (words seem very inadequate) mind and body seemed to dissolve and my first thought was "This is why I have been sitting here." (astonishment) Later I asked myself why that was my first thought. Why had I been sitting there? What was it that I suddenly knew?

> Now I realize that suddenly I knew that I am a part of everything and everything is a part of me. Also I am nothing and do not exist. It was a coming to a zero. Everything is interconnected.
>
> And then the joy flooded me. The joy was overwhelming and seemed to obscure that brief instant when I came to zero.
>
> The retreat this past weekend was a productive one. Aren't they all! How can it be so hard just to sit and walk! I was expecting that this would somehow be easier so once again I was trapped by my expectations. I also recounted the experience to Peter [*the meditation instructor*] and now I feel that I can be finished with it. My ego was too attached to the experience and I am beginning to feel free of it. I am feeling blessedly ordinary. The insights are still there – more equanimity than before, a deeper compassion for people's suffering and a deep commitment to daily meditation. In the last day I have felt a deeper sense of gratitude to family and friends. After the last retreat I felt rather odd – being able to see people more clearly and having a drastically different view point. I now feel more like than unlike others and ready to resume my ordinary life. Is there any other kind?

This set of reflections is more fully considered both by virtue of the time she has lived with her initial insight and its *composed* form. The earlier problematics of language and others – intrinsically related, of course – have subsided here. If the insight may be said to have been disruptive (in this, a correspondence with wonder is evident), how is this to be conceived and what has it borne in the economies of Shelley's life?

Bollnow's discussion contains reference to the chaos which results in the lived-space from displacing things, and to the necessity of returning things to their places.[4] Can Shelley's experience be considered disruptive in this way? Certainly a *shift* in her manner of being with others and the things of her life is evident throughout. What I wish to return our attention to is that the people and things of Shelley's lifeworld have not been displaced or overturned – rather, they have gained breadth. That is, the "disruption" evident in the present instance is not one of displacement but of space and proportion; the development or maturation which is evident in these reflections does not entail a jumbled world being reordered, but rather, a reorientation over time to its more generous *scale*. Perhaps most remarkable is the manner in which others are understood: the generosity of scale to which she has become attentive is expressed in a more compassionate and engaged outlook.

The subtle contingency of the joy which suffused her originally is now recalled and articulated. For her, this is the beginning of an experience which has come, as it were, out of the blue, like lightening. Whatever else this emphatically simple realisation may have

brought into Shelley's experience it is *this* to which she is most fundamentally drawn. Indeed, the vivid intensity of her experience, throughout, and the acuity of this recognition – "This is why I have been sitting here" – rather uncannily echo these words of another meditator:

> "Oh, it's *this*" I exclaimed, reeling in astonishment, my mind a total emptiness. "Ting-a-ling, ting-a-ling" – a bell's ringing. How cool and refreshing! It impels me to rise and move about. All freshness and purity itself. Every single object is dancing vividly, inviting me to look. Every single thing occupies its natural place and breathes quietly.[5]

In the end it is interest ("being," *esse*; "in the midst," *inter*) which seems most clearly to define the essence of these observations. The insight which Shelley has experienced has in effect thrown, or "released," her into the very face of things. Earlier, the absence of difference was observed, the fact that, with people and things experienced without preference they are equally themselves. In the way she describes this, while finding herself palpably in the middle of things even her own existence has achieved this unity with others. We might say that, far from losing all significance, in her "coming to a zero" the presence of everything has become equally significant.

The inquiry into the phenomenology of meditation retreats that is undertaken in this chapter is derived to an important degree from interview material with retreat participants. The individuals with whom I conversed both during and between retreats over the course of three years vary widely as to their backgrounds, motivations for attending, and encounter with meditative practice. With the narrative in Chapter Three we have had an introduction to some of the modalities of retreat experience: the daily routine, the silence, the sitting and walking meditations, student-teacher interactions, and so on. Not surprisingly, it is often about such matters that these interview subjects spoke when the opportunity arose: "How did your back hold out at the last retreat?" "Wasn't the cook *great*?" or "I'm not finding the walking meditation nearly as difficult as I used to...." Similarly, recall Shelley once again discovering it "so hard to just sit and walk" at her recent retreat. Yet, we are now concerned with the phenomenology of meditation retreats, with the dimensions and character of this experience in itself as this can be revealed through description. We are interested, that is, with its essential qualities as distinct from other forms of experience, and as such need to investigate structural themes of meditating in retreat circumstances – that which tumbles out of conversations unexpectedly, that which is divulged when the conversation has achieved a commodious

tenor or, even, those themes which to a certain extent may remain implicit in the usual observations made by participants.

Of course, no description of such essential[6] qualities will ever determine these phenomena... which in any case will continue becoming what they are. (Is it necessary, is it prudent, to note that I don't wish to claim this analysis will be definitive? comprehensive?) Nor am I the first person to face the task of discovering or interrogating (*rogāre*: ask; *inter*: in the midst) the underlying characteristics within experiences to which I have – in *some* sense – become accustomed (the qualifier is called for, since the meditative process is a kind of "interrogation" of habit). Nevertheless, my concern is that these descriptions and analyses be sufficiently "evocative and precise"[7] to yield what is possible of the unique experiential character of meditation retreats. To put this chapter into context: in the present phenomenological analysis, I make only minimal reference to the specifically "Buddhist" foundations for this practice. The (more precisely, "a") Buddhist perspective upon the human condition and meditative praxis is the focus of the examination in Chapter Seven. These two discussions will then offer a basis for Chapter Eight's concluding inquiry into the distinct pedagogy and curriculum of retreats in which "insight" meditation is practised.

Whatever other fascinations the traditions of Buddhism may hold for people of the Western world it is clear that Buddhist forms of meditation are among the more prominent of them. Whether the focus is upon Japanese Sōtō Zen or Tibetan rDzogs-chen in various Western cities one can discover individuals and groups cultivating some personal or shared aim by way of meditation. In consonance with this growing interest is the increasing availability of weekly classes and extended retreats in *vipassanā*, or "insight" meditation, as it is practised in Theravāda Buddhism. This interest has both been stimulated by and reflected in the proliferation of studies detailing the therapeutic and what might be called the "religio-therapeutic" possibilities of *vipassanā* meditation – I make this distinction because so far as insight meditation is concerned for many practitioners peace of mind or stress-reduction likely figure more importantly than religious "awakening" as the acknowledged motivation to practice,[8] though this is not to say that the age-old religious function of insight practice is altogether absent among Western practitioners. In any case, the predominant emphasis of many of these studies has been to provide the reader with a clear technical grounding in practice and to situate these techniques within a Buddhist doctrinal framework. Often these presentations bear the imprint of monastic commentarial authority and practical tradition. Of the dozens avail-

able, the early contributions of Mahasi Saydaw[9] and Nyanaponika Thera[10] are possibly the most widely-known. A more recent study by Sayadaw U Pandita[11] bears mentioning in the same light.

In addition, since the 1970s a growing collection of studies has been generated out of the involvement of Western practitioners; in this the Americans Joseph Goldstein[12] and Stephen Levine[13] have been especially influential. Works of this kind have presented the salient technical features of *vipassanā* practice, as well as some of the striking developmental experiences it is said to encourage.[14] They vividly portray the quietly animated atmosphere found in intensive meditation retreats and are frequently distinguished by their candid personal accounts of (among the panorama of sensations and emotions) the discomfort, joy, confusion, ease, frustration, illumination, anxiety, irritation, enthusiasm, gratitude, and boredom which tend to arise during this practice. They also demonstrate that the traditionally sanctioned method of practising meditation under the direct guidance of a skilled teacher remains very much in evidence. Retreat lectures and personal interviews which offer sensitive technical clarification often figure in these presentations. In addition to providing vicarious direction and encouragement to readers they reveal, sometimes rather intensely, the significance and delicacy of this relationship. As already noted, we will return, in the final chapter, to a detailed examination of the characteristics and dynamics of the relations between teachers and students. Here, we are concerned with other modalities of retreat experience.

Even if it were not immodest to attempt it, Shelley's reflections upon her initial experience of insight at the retreat and how it has begun to inform her manner of being-in-the-world is too rich a narrative simply to *explain*. The questions raised by this compelling narrative are many and diverse. However, along with the many shorter records of interview reflections that will figure in this chapter, it presents to us detailed and reverberant intimations of meditative experience and "insight." What if anything do they permit us to conclude about the meditative disciplines of retreats and the insights they provoke? In order to respond to these and other questions, the remaining discussions in the chapter are organised as follows: First, the nature of the "retreat" and the discipline and experience of "mindfulness" are examined. These are followed by an inquiry into mindfulness meditation as an "interrogation of habit" and a "disciplined resistance." Next, I examine dimensions of meditative experience when it is "well-practised," and finally, we return explicitly to the experience of insight which has opened our present discussion.

The Retreat

Ask a woman why she is attending university, ask a couple why they wish to become parents, ask anyone what being Canadian means to them and a range of responses will ensue, from the most vague to those informed by the myriad particularities of a life narrative. The question of retreat participation is no different:

What Brings You?

Alex: Unfortunately, the reason that I was there was at my wife's urging. She thought it would be good for me! (*laughs*)

James: The first one I can clearly remember is in Japan, in 1972. And the reason I first made retreats, and maybe still do, is that I think that I'm going to accomplish something, that I'm going to come away from the retreat being happier, or more serene in the face of the circumstances of my life than I was before I made it... I don't as often think, although I think that this is maybe really the more mature view, that a retreat is kind of an opportunity to practice a skill which then, in the circumstances of life, may come in handy. I don't think that I as often consider it in this way.

Chloe: I think people start going to retreats because they have a specific problem; I think that's what the main drive is.

PH: Was this true for you?

Chloe: With me... I didn't think I had any problems. (*laughs*) I think we were just playing; we were curious. It was just something else to do along the yoga line, and we had experimented with primal scream and all that kind of stuff. And then we moved back here and that retreat just sort of popped up – we thought "hey, that would be kind of a neat thing" and we really didn't... I didn't anticipate having any problems with it at all. But it certainly was a problem. It was quite apparent I had many problems that I thought I didn't have! (*laughs*)

PH: Why do you come to retreats?

Monica: Why? I guess it's the fact that I was intrigued by it to go – that *intrigue* is still there. I still feel it. To me it's the mystery of not having *any idea* of what's going to happen. Since every retreat has been different – some more pleasant than others – but they have always been very eye-opening experiences. Such neat things happen. So it's the curiosity. I don't want to miss it. I'm just so intrigued by it.

'Retreat From'

Meditation retreats, however much they may vary in physical location, schedule and character of meditative practice, or tenor of instruction, have in common an intentional

distancing from daily routine and the vagaries of social obligation and intercourse.[15] This notion of distancing deserves elaboration. Setting aside for the moment the question of the nature of the social relations with which one is engaged or the particular problems one is experiencing with coping, it seems fitting in a colloquial sense to speak simply of leaving, or achieving some space from, the "world." Indeed, where retreats have had an explicitly religious function this designation has often been used. In a kind of shorthand common to us all, the state or character of the "world" is amenable to quick summation. Frequently, but not always, it is regarded as being of a problematic nature:

"Yeah, the world is really screwed up these days";

"You've really got to have your wits about you to make it in this world";

"The world is getting smaller all the time";

"Yeah, but whatever its problems, this world of ours is a great place";

"Unplugging the phone's the only way of keeping the world out sometimes";

"You can't shelter your kids from the world forever, you know";

"He's so aloof these days, like he's trying to keep the world at bay";

"It's sure great to say 'to hell with the world' once in a while," and so on.

Accordingly, in view of this distancing, the "world"[16] can be viewed in roughly two ways: as something to be observed at a certain distance (in order to understand oneself better, for instance); and more radically, as something to leave behind. Indeed, of the several meanings of "retreat," perhaps the first to come to mind is the exclamation of military flight: *RETREAT*! While this would be easy to exaggerate, perhaps somewhat surprisingly there can be an element of expedient withdrawal with meditation retreats, too. What can precipitate this? During our lengthy conversation, the Venerable Henepola Gunaratana, a senior Sri Lankan Buddhist monk with several decades' teaching experience in North America, offered the following:[17]

> I think there have been numerous domestic problems, economic problems, psychological problems, and... social issues. Their own personal inability to cope with their tensions, worries, fears – sometimes people have certain diseases and they are very much afraid of them – primarily fear, insecurity and the lack of self-esteem. And their sort of upbringing, guilty feelings – these are the issues that come up more often. Students will come to us for their interviews. Some of them have been abused in their childhood, then they look to meditation as a remedy to cope with that traumatic experience in their childhood. Not so much: "liberation from samsara" and so forth – these are very... maybe way down the road somewhere, but what prompted them to get involved with meditation are those things.

Although a precipitous flight, as such, may seldom be entailed, Gunaratana's assessment is borne out in a rather dramatic manner in the recollections of some meditators. What we sometimes encounter is an acknowledgement that meditation, and in particular the pursuit of meditation in the more dedicated context of retreats, is or was at one time viewed as being not simply of interest, but of *crucial* significance:

Marion: At that time I was just seeking something other than what I knew I had in my environment at that time. I was about 28 years old and finding life was just not what I thought it was going to be like; that point in life when I thought that there had to be more, dissatisfied inside of myself. I was working in business, and Alex was away a lot, and I was looking and seeking for more fulfillment. Also at that time I was in a headspace where I sometimes felt like I was going a bit crazy. I didn't know why I had this internal sadness: what did I have to be unhappy about? There was a very... unsettled sense inside of me.

Carl: It just hit me kind of all at once, and I got very dissatisfied with where I had been in my life and very unsure about how to progress further. And for some reason I had it in my head that meditation of some description would help sort of settle things out a bit and allow me to handle things. I sort of saw my life and the path I walk as a very, very fine line between... I don't know what extremes, but I guess the way I could phrase it is, I added up in my mind how many steps it would take to go from where I feel fairly comfortable with life, and everything seems to be going rather well, to just total destitution, to the point of not wanting to live anymore. And I could come up with less than five or six events that would happen, one after the other, to where I could just go to that spot.

Sandra: Probably I wanted to get away from home for a few days on my own. I don't know if you know that my daughter has a physical disability and she took a lot of time and effort, and... just energy. I needed to get away. And I think that was one of the reasons I started to get away to retreats – I had to replenish myself just in order to cope and carry on.... And I think that's one of the things I've been dealing with, too, the suppressed pain from raising her.

Are these people retreating from the "world," though? Under closer scrutiny our life-worlds tend to reduce in scope and become far more *local*. For instance, we commonly distinguish between the human and animal worlds, or speak of the world of fashion, race relations, investment banking, cooking, dog care and so on. Such "worlds" are abstracted from an indeterminate sum of possible life experiences. What does "retreat" signify in the experience of meditators? What I suggest in the present context is that to retreat is to gain some experiential space in relation to *conspicuous*, or in some instances

to abandon *unwelcome*, features of one's life – features which are not global but characterised, instead, by their specificity. Gunaratana's examples show meditators retreating from guilt, fear, traumatic memory. Similarly, we see above the meditators have made retreats from specific concerns: Marion from confusion and sadness, Carl from mounting worries, Sandra from the unrelenting responsibilities of home.

It is interesting to consider Sandra's recollection in view of our common hope that home ought to be, as Max van Manen remarks, "where we can *be* what *we are*."[18] Is her home a place where she is unable to "be" in this sense? Most likely the ability of home to be such a place cannot be taken for granted with any of us. Notice that neither Sandra nor any of the others has sought out a permanent retreat; they all had conceived of some value in gaining temporary space from specific features of their lives. Accordingly, we might refer to retreats as spaces in which what Heidegger calls the "plight of dwelling"[19] is engaged.

Peter: What brought me to retreats was sort of serendipitous, I would say, a compounding of events. What kept me going back to it was something else again. What brought me back to it was... it was *home*. It was the home that I thought I was going to come back to after moving out of my family home, except *more so*, and it was a surprise to me.

As we will shortly be seeing, the fact that daily concerns are in one sense being left behind does not ensure that retreat experience is "easy." Much seems to accompany us into this setting. Also, the very conditions of practising mindfulness meditation under these rather intense conditions tend to generate forms of struggle. Nevertheless, Peter's observation has shown that retreats can be experienced as places of dwelling in their own right, as places to which people not only *go*, but *come* or *return*.

'Retreat Into'

Yet, beyond a possible degree of urgency underlying this withdrawal from taxing or difficult circumstances, the question of the "experience" of retreat remains. Clearly our use of the word "retreat" has other connotations than the act of retiring in the face of danger. By far its more prevalent usage is the conscious act of (used as a verb) "withdrawing to" (as a noun) a "place of privacy, seclusion."[20] Therefore, just as a retreat is a deliberate distancing, a movement *away*, it is just as importantly a movement *to* something – to a location which is experientially distinct from the normal spaces, routines, obligations and relations of our everyday "world."

Is it possible, as we say, to "go on retreat" without going anywhere, by remaining in one's familiar world? How much distance is necessary? For that matter, what actually constitutes this distance? In her later years, my first teacher of meditation, Anagarika Dhamma Dinna was in the habit of making a lengthy (three month) retreat each winter in her home. Granted, her possible distractions were limited by the seclusion of the place and by her informing those she knew of the retreat's duration, asking that she not be visited or telephoned. Yet Anagarika remained surrounded by the various objects and responsibilities of domestic life and to some extent, presumably, by the way in which these things reminded her of what needed doing and who she was. Thus, in what manner had she retreated? In what sense did her home become a place of retreat? We are obliged by these questions to inquire into the phenomenology of the retreat, and meditation, with greater precision.

Alex: Well, I guess retreats bring a temporary escape from the business of the world. I guess that's what they really mean to me; and it's an opportunity to do some inner reflections.

Teresa: In my daily life I go from the work framework to the watching-the-news framework, to the drive-the-car framework: everything's constantly changing. And I have all of these personas that I go through in a day that I slip in and out of. But all of that social energy is *uncalled* for, it's unrequired in retreats. Really, when you look at the retreat, what is different between when you look at that and real life, it's the external conditions, right? And the people that are in that environment are important for that experience too, it's not just the building, it's the conditions. But they're all just external; and your internal clock changes, and the longer you go the quicker you can make that switch.

Dennis: One of the things that attracted me to the retreat environment originally was the idea of looking within with no external influence, and being in conditions of solitude – where all of the external conditions were removed and you had the opportunity to see what was going on inside.

These three reflections repeatedly indicate a distinction relevant for understanding retreats and the meditative practice they promote – the distinction between "outer" and "inner." In a sense, we come again to the issue of distance, and the spaces gained by achieving this distance. First, there is the temporary distance gained from the outer world. This is the world-at-large: brash, busy and filled with social demands. In this lifeworld time is short, or runs too quickly; one's space is crowded by the complex demands of economics and others. In its concreteness, that from which distance is sought varies. Need this space be physical? The example of Anagarika's annual retreat suggests

not – at least, in the qualified sense that *dis*-location is not necessary. However, it is evident that social withdrawal was a crucial factor.[21] Second, the distance so-gained opens up the space of the "inner." This inner world is perceived to be quiet, reflective and more moderately paced. The experience of time softens with the changes to one's "internal clock" and social relations become subdued in the meditative silence. These conditions offer the opportunity to look within.

Not that we should assume from such expressions that retreats themselves are always easy. We will return to this, but it is worth noting the Zen teacher Joko Beck's reference to the retreat environment as a kind of "artificial crisis."

> When we commit ourselves to a retreat, we have to stay and struggle with a difficult situation. By the end of the retreat, most of us have gone through the crisis – at least enough so that we see our life somewhat differently.[22]

Our inquiry into the nature of meditation, soon to follow, will reveal something of the characteristics of this world, this medium of space. It is here that we encounter its silence(s), as well as the various modes of discipline or meditative technique prescribed in mindfulness practice. Before doing so – and as a preview of what sorts of things this space *opens* – it is worth briefly considering how one's world is experienced following immersion into the retreat.

Return to the 'World'

What does the world look like, feel like, when one returns from the modes of space which the retreat has required and achieved? As we have seen with meditators' motivations for coming to retreats, here again, the experiences of returning from retreats vary.

PH: What does the outside world feel like afterwards?

Teresa: Despairing… I mean, when I see the outside world it makes me more motivated to do the practice, because you recognise you don't want to be in the mire anymore. Yeah, you see the world in a more realistic way.

PH: So there's this ambivalence… maybe that's not the right word, but does it make living in the world a little more difficult?

Teresa: Yeah, that's the paradox, something I've been struggling with a lot, lately. And watching Anagarika particularly, and really seeing her *joy* – her spontaneous joy – constantly, and the paradox of that, and knowing that she thought the whole world was suffering! (*laughs*) You know, when I first started that just fascinated me. Isn't that interesting that those two would reside in someone: obviously that's the middle path. That's the wonder of it for me; it's always been one of the things that have intrigued me, and that personally I don't get yet…. I understand it more and more, but I'm waiting for that one to really *click*.

Dennis: When I go to a retreat I go to a different world; afterwards, becoming re-familiar with this world is very difficult.

PH: What would you say retreats do for you?

Sylvia: I believe that its... that in meditation experience occasionally there are very fine glimmers of a different mindset, a very pure form of thinking, where there isn't anything, and I think that's what started me in this. You're in search of something beyond your daily concerns. When you experience mindfulness and awareness, and just a pure form of being, it brings you to believe that there's a lot that the mind itself can accomplish. So, when you come out of the retreat you view your day as having much less chaos, even though it *is* very chaotic. Like in the operating room where you have a trauma coming in and everyone's running around doing their job, it's as if even though you're at a really quickened pace you're still going step by step; there's a calm in it, no panic. There's more awareness. At least I find that.

PH: What happened afterwards? Can you lead me through the experience?

Janet: Well, the retreat's over. It's a day or two later, everybody's gone home. I'm walking down the road, the sun's shining, there's the blossom, the bee in the blossom... some berries were out, so there were the steps: the berry and the flower.... I don't know why that was so *big*. Maybe... yeah, it's that there was *such delight*. Maybe when you experience that kind of delight it goes into the rest of life? I think that was probably the first time I had felt *that* kind of pure joy. So maybe that's it: maybe for me that was like a seed that got planted, that happened once so now when I see things in daily life... that joy reaches into life.

Sarah: I've sometimes described it as coming back with "new eyes." I think that every time I come back from a retreat like this I come back with new eyes. See things just a bit differently.

PH: You and I keep coming back to retreats. What draws you back to them?

Pamela: Entirely circumstantial. I found an *ease* at the retreat, you know, emotionally. It was difficult at the retreat but when I went home I found an ease that I don't think I'd had before.

PH: An emotional ease?

Pamela: Like I felt easier with everybody, including myself. And a clarity now, that didn't happen the first time, that I remember. As time goes on I find that my mind goes clearer and I find that when I go home I can do quite difficult things in about half the time I normally take because my mind has become a lot more one-pointed. I feel I'm a lot – well, *most* of the time (*laughs*) – a lot more tolerant of other people, and of life in general. I find not only more tolerance but *joy* in life. I think because of our attempt to be in the "now" that joy becomes more apparent to us, that things that would have escaped me before I noticed where they were... and so I'm more able

> to experience more fully because I'm right *there* and not somewhere else. So I think that *is* part of the joy, and also I'm sure that lots of us have had the experience of colour being a lot brighter after a retreat, and everything being more... *alive*, somehow.

The opening examination of Shelley's retreat experience has introduced some themes that emerge again in these recollections. The "joy that reaches into life," the "new eyes" and emotional ease expressed here resonate profoundly with Shelley's earlier observations. They indicate once more that certain changes occurring in retreats may make their way into the broader reaches of life. In such cases we observe a perceptible momentum at work which carries from the "inner" into the meditator's "outer" circumstances, as if the gap or difference between them had narrowed.

Not that we should assume from such expressions that they uniformly make all other dimensions of living trouble-free. Indeed, after the inner withdrawal of retreats the return to the demanding obligations of the social world can be taxing. As has been noted, the various spaces and tempos of the "inner" and "outer" worlds are often in stark contrast with one another and, just as the characteristics of retreats require care or effort to adjust to, re-entering the rapid and noisy currents of daily life can also be a struggle. Since the concrete realities which prompt individuals to gain some distance from this outer world vary, it follows that the particular tenor of struggle they encounter on their return (not to mention the struggles encountered while engaged *in* meditation retreats) will be unique. It also seems possible that the increased acuity which brings to some an alive or joyful sense of experience may, conversely, bring the struggles and despairs of life more sharply into focus. Thus the deliberate withdrawal from the social world, the world of home and responsibilities which is accomplished in retreats can make the commonly articulated distinctions between inner and outer all the more pronounced. Perhaps what one sees with these "new eyes" depends largely upon where one happens to stand. Or, might it be that what Teresa and Dennis are expressing above is their deepening acquaintance with what John Caputo calls life's "original difficulty"?[23] And if it is, what would prompt them to continue such a practice?

Sylvia's poised demeanour within the precise, exacting demands of the operating room – a still centre in the storm – plainly rebuts the caricature of the meditator as disengaged or other-worldly in outlook. It also confirms that a palpable tenor can emerge in retreats and continue to resound in one's daily life. On occasion, seemingly, the inner *space* which is sought and cultivated in retreats becomes sufficiently open to enter calmly into the disconcerting tumult which so often characterises the "outer" world, as if this space

does not simply *extend* from one domain into the other, but is also *found to be present* elsewhere.

To this juncture I have been considering the meaning of "retreat" in itself. As such, we see that the phenomena of distance or space are crucial features of this activity. However, realtors, university professors, married couples, peace activists, middle managers, yoga practitioners, cancer patients may also attend one or other form of retreat dedicated to their pursuits or concerns in the hope of acquiring or deepening skills, and gaining fresh perspectives on their work, relationships or lifeworlds. Most likely, to be termed "retreats" all such activities will involve a degree of withdrawal from one's customary surroundings. But what of "insight meditation" retreats? As yet little has been said of the modes of discipline and attention – the silence, the sitting and walking practice, the social dimension – of the meditative practice which constitutes the retreats with which we are concerned. It is to an explication of these features that we now turn.

Mindful Occupation: *When eating soup is eating soup*

I am almost certain that I ate lunch in my office yesterday. That is, given the usual state of my appetite I'm sure about having eaten, but it's possible that I ate it in the coffee area. Now, twenty-four hours later, I'm attempting to retrieve a sense of what I had and how it was. As nearly as I can recall it consisted of a bagel, an apple and some carrots (or did I bring carrots the day before?)... although this sounds rather scanty. How did I eat it? Since I was occupied with reading, about then (*ah*: most likely I stayed in the office), I seem to recall continuing this activity while snatching a bite (of whatever it was... didn't I heat something up?) from time to time. What was I reading? Well, it had to do with this chapter, that's certain. But no particular article or book comes to mind. Admittedly, sometimes what I'm reading is passed over so quickly it leaves little impression; this is especially true when I'm looking for something, without knowing what. I think it's fair to surmise that the reading in itself achieved no particular consequence at the time. Knowing how these things work, this suggests to me that in addition to eating and reading I was probably busy worrying over how this chapter was taking shape – all pretty normal. And who knows? maybe the question of what I would have for supper came to mind, too. It shouldn't be ruled it out.

At the very least, this obscurity about yesterday's midday meal reveals a state of preoccupation. In a distressingly accurate sense, in fact, it is difficult to determine "what" I was actually doing. Ironically, someone looking in on me might have been quite im-

pressed with my seeming diligence, but it is not with appearances that I am presently concerned. In any case, today over lunch things have been different. I ate my soup *mindfully.*

Buddhists did not invent the word "mindfulness," nor is Buddhist meditation the sole means for developing it. Nevertheless, its growing frequency of usage in English may owe something to the fact that it is most commonly used to translate the Pali term *sati,* and that it is to the cultivation of this lucid experience of attentiveness which a good deal of Buddhist praxis is explicitly tuned. As noted earlier, I will leave to the next chapter the more technical background which supports and informs this meditative practice. Our present question is more modest: how would one go about eating soup mindfully?

Presumably, in whichever context one chooses this would entail eating the soup while being free of distraction. One might notice in the moment, or remark in retrospect, that she had eaten a bowl of soup "mindfully," meaning that its taste or texture, let's say, had been so good that she had been very alert to the experiences of consuming it. One *knows* one is eating soup and does not wish it to be otherwise or to be doing something else, for instance. (In conventional usage, it seems, when we are mindful we are also *enjoying* something; can one be equally "present" to aversion, indifference?) It is also conceivable that someone might *set out* to eat with mindfulness. This is a bit different, since the person is now adding an air of deliberation to the activity: perhaps she chooses a quiet time or spot, eats more slowly, and attempts to remain alert to the experience at hand by letting go of distracting thoughts; perhaps she unplugs the phone. (Taken even further this could begin to constitute a fully-fledged "retreat.")

With these two examples we run a slight risk of confusion. To clarify: the first is an experience of mindfulness; the second a "practice" aimed at developing and/or continuing the experience. With its intentional character, my own case resembles the latter example. Drawing from an acquaintance of meditation retreats, I employed a form of discipline to eat the soup as a means to develop more mindfulness. From Chapter Three we already know something of the peculiar mechanical character which mindfulness practice can assume. In eating the soup, today, I didn't employ any verbal "labeling" of actions. But the same methodical slowness of movement was observed. This is how I ate the soup:

I am sitting upright in the chair and waiting for a moment, observing my breath and the intention to eat. My hands are on my lap. Now, I turn my right hand to a right angle on my lap. I stop

the movement. Now I raise it. Stop. Move it to the spoon. Stop. Grasp the spoon. Stop. Lift the spoon from the table. Stop. Move the spoon to the soup. Stop. Lower the spoon into the soup. Stop. Fill the spoon. Stop. Raise the spoon to the mouth. Stop. Blow on the soup. Judge its temperature. Place spoon in mouth. Suck soup from spoon. Remove spoon from mouth. Stop. Lower spoon to bowl. Stop. Place spoon in soup. Stop. Release spoon. Stop. Draw hand towards body, parallel to the table. Stop. Lower hand to lap. Stop. (Just before hand touches lap.) Touch lap. Stop. Turn hand to rest on lap. Stop. Close eyes. Chew the solid food in soup. (Noticing: taste, sensations; noticing: naming food – "peas," "carrots"; noticing: teeth coming together; noticing: teeth moving apart is more automatic.) Swallow some liquid. (Momentary relief as it passes down throat.) Chew more solid food. (Tongue moving around teeth.) Swallow food. (Clean teeth and mouth with tongue.) Swallow. Notice mouth is empty. Notice intention to take a spoonful of soup. Place attention on right hand. Open eyes. Turn hand to right angle. Stop... and so on.

This is an instance of a rather disciplined form of cultivating attention. On first reading, this account may appear very odd, but the issue, of course, lies elsewhere – can the utter distinctness between these consecutive experiences of eating lunch be in any doubt? Yet it might be asked, since I am in both cases occupied, have I not been "mindful" during both lunches? What is the difference? For one thing, in the second instance I have not been *pre*-occupied, distracted from what lies immediately at hand. As mindfulness develops in the midst of attention to discrete actions, there is little *room* for preoccupation. On a normally busy day a couple of minutes may suffice to finish the small bowl soup; I can be done "before I know it." Today, it required twelve minutes, and the experiences involved were for the most part very clear – I surely *knew* that I was eating soup. (During a retreat, without talking, it can easily take a full hour to consume a meal.) Accordingly, mindfulness of the sort we are examining here is not having a "full" mind, but *fully minding* one's experience.

In the more elegant vein of a brief narrative, Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese meditation teacher and social activist, draws our attention to the underlying attitude that is necessary for training oneself in mindfulness:

> I usually wash the dishes after we've finished the evening meal, before sitting down and drinking tea with everyone. One night, Jim asked if he might do the dishes. I said, "Go ahead, but if you wash the dishes you must know the way to wash them." Jim replied, "Come on, you think I don't know how to wash the dishes?" I answered, "There are two ways to wash the dishes. The first is to wash the dishes in order to have clean dishes and the second is to wash the dishes in order to wash the dishes."[24]

To be unmindful, or "mindless," is to be indistinct about what is happening or what one is doing, where the attention is always "elsewhere," as if it had a "mind of its own"! Nhat Hanh also suggests, here, that mindfulness does not look *elsewhere* (i.e., ahead, to having clean dishes) but resides simply with what is happening. Normally, before I know: "eating soup," my attention is already engaged – awareness of what I am doing has been predisposed. I am partially disengaged from the things which constitute my experience by this preoccupation. Although this, too, is a mode of action, when preoccupied I do not seem fully present in the activities and textures of experience. (Not even in the preoccupation itself.) When "mindless," my engagement with the moment is thus limited, superficial. What am I doing when preoccupied? *Nothing in particular*. Mindfulness, on the other hand, is the experience of being fully present to the textures of each moment.[25]

An analogy might be helpful. When a friend asks us to mind his or her young daughter in the playground for a few minutes we become alert to the child in a different way. An absorbing game, the Walkman, the novel or reverie we had recently been taken up with – each, is consciously set aside. Now that we have agreed to this responsibility, preoccupation or distraction are experienced concretely to stand in the way of our attentiveness *to this child*. On the other hand our responsibilities are quite simple. We are not required to plan her next meal, let alone formulate aspirations for the child's future schooling. Let us even add that since she is happily taken up with play, we needn't become *directly* engaged with her. (Why interfere?) A comfortable space is fine. Because even our ability to respond to her is contingent on paying attention, during these few minutes, above all, we need to watch her "well." Mindfulness requires the clearing away of distractions or preoccupations and is akin to this light, discrete, attentive gaze.

Meditative discipline involves choosing as the principal focus for attention precisely that with which we are presently occupied. Unlike the common preoccupations that so often overtake our daily activities, then, whether we are speaking of the experience of being mindful or the practice of establishing mindfulness, what is essential is a *willing occupation with present experience.*

Mindfulness as an Interrogation of Habit

Just as distractions or preoccupations are dissolved in the face of mindful attention, to an important degree habit, too, does not co-exist with mindfulness. The rage or panicked braking triggered by a jarring horn blast; flaring impatience with a child's recurrent tardiness; the unexpectedly concrete need elicited by an advertisement; sudden, provoca-

tive longing at the sight of a naked torso; the flush of anger one feels at a parent's criticism; the humid pleasure rising up to meet the aromas of a morning's baking – in whatever the circumstances of its arising, habit happens *to* us. For an action to be habitual means that it has become a *re-action*. Of course, it is important to acknowledge the distinct genealogies of "habit": those regarding which we seem to have had no say – unwitting habits; and those we have deliberately cultivated. Most of the habitual attitudes or actions described here belong to the former. Even when they are deliberate, however, the relationship between habit and mindfulness is revealing.

Consider an exceptional driver. We might conclude that a driver becomes highly skilled due to her having developed excellent habits over a broad range of driving conditions, speeds and so on. Needless to say, such a driver would be ill-advised, during a quick lane change in busy traffic, to begin to observe in all their fleeting detail the sensation of the steering wheel's vibration, her intention to turn the wheel, apply the brakes, etc., or in any way impose upon herself a discipline of discrete attentiveness in the manner of my soup meditation! But how did she learn to drive? Possibly it began on a country road or parking lot, under a parent's guidance. Each function, each movement or glance – to the turn signal, right side mirror, lights, accelerator, steering wheel, left side mirror, brake pedal (manual transmission? even worse) – required separate attention. The radio was off (too distracting); the passenger-trainer kept directions simple. The car's first movements were uncertain, ponderous. A small incident, or a preoccupation with any single action (where's the wiper switch?), could have brought it to an awkward halt or caused it to veer.... Although we may forget the details of our having gained driving habits, that is, they begin with careful, discrete attention which in its early stages resembles the deliberate practice of mindfulness practice. This process is present elsewhere: witness the immense effort of a young violinist in the early stages of coordinating his reading, bowing and fingering techniques. Similarly, Patricia Benner has analysed various characteristics which are evident in nurses possessing differing levels of "experience," and observes of "novices" and "advanced beginners" that they "can take in little of the situation: it is too new, too strange, and besides, they have to concentrate on remembering the rules they have been taught."[26] Mindfulness is at first evident in the disjointed nature of such movements; their later fluidity does not signal its absence but, rather, its integration into that economy of perception, motion and response which announces to us a set of well-developed habits.

Further acquaintance with the structure of meditative praxis will be useful here. For practising mindfulness meditation, four positions or activities are identified: walking, standing, sitting and lying down. Most often, two of these, sitting and walking, comprise the majority of practice in retreats.

Sitting practice frequently entails mindfulness of the breath, meaning that attention is applied to the sensation of the abdomen rising and falling, or of the breath passing in and out of the nostrils. *Try not to control the breathing. Can you simply "watch" it without interfering? is the belly soft? is there a slight tension, has the breath become arrhythmic, awkward? do you notice it simply continuing by itself? is the beginning of the breath apparent? the ending? can you see the spaces?*

Walking practice focuses mindfulness upon the sensations of (for instance) lifting, moving and placing the feet. *Notice: raise the heel of one foot only when the other has fully settled on the floor; otherwise you will confuse mindfulness with simultaneous "objects." Make each movement very distinct, stopping when the "lifting" has ended, before beginning the "moving." Does your thinking continue? is it punctuated by your attention, now, to "placing"? has walking become unsteady?*

In standing and lying meditations, as well, attention is applied to specific features of experience, beginning with the body's distinct *feel* in each of these positions. *Do you notice how the blood pressure changes as the body reclines and settles into the lying state? do you feel a warmth developing in the feet, the intricacies of balancing, when standing?*

PH: Can you describe what it's like to meditate?

Sarah: I suppose it's that every experience is very *vivid* and things seem to... things that you observe in your mind – sometimes I see them in parts rather than seeing a whole. Experience is one of slowness... separate little moments, events.

With movement slowed, with attention directed at particularities of breath, movement, sensation, they are noticed and become *evident*. As Sarah observes, mindfulness develops an attentiveness to increasingly discrete aspects of experience.

In addition to the form this attentiveness takes, in the given positions, the practitioner is directed to acknowledge or note other experiences which come to his or her attention – sounds, itches, memories, for instance – and then gently to bring the attention back to the principal object of attention. This, at once, disciplined and flexible focus during mindfulness meditation conforms to the traditional emphasis upon the "four founda-

tions of mindfulness" delineated in the classical source for this practice, the "Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness," *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*: mindfulness of the body (its movements and position, for instance), the sensations or feelings (whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral), mind states (including moods, emotions), and mental objects (i.e., thoughts).

Both the walking discipline and all physical movement required in the daily course of events are conducted at a deliberate pace. Nothing which occurs during the retreat is incidental or irrelevant; moving slowly, "consciously," permits the mind to attend more clearly to the array of momentary experiences. Doing so effectively presents them to mind for observation, which in turn develops or increases the strength of mindfulness. This is because discrete features of slow actions are more readily attended to in their particularity, whereas rapid movement presents sensations too quickly for mind fully to receive or acknowledge, and is therefore antithetical to the presence of mindfulness. Such experiences are indistinct because attention does not have the capacity, as yet, to notice them as they are.

Accordingly, because it is routine, *unobserved in the present*, habitual action is initially an impediment to the arising of clear attention and, eventually, *put into question* by it. For instance, among the other conditions of retreats, their social silence can quickly bring to the attention our reflexive urges to offer comment or correction, to be witty.

Sylvia: I think that silence prevents a kind of clutter in mind – having to think of what to say and having to say it. It calms social distractions, and I think it helps the task at hand: the continuation of mindfulness. There's such a strong tendency to interact with others, sometimes.

Sylvia's remarks accord with the "retreat" as a withdrawal from social "distractions" discussed earlier. But in her sensitivity to its repercussions upon mindful attention she also permits us to speak of a retreat from language. Interestingly, for all the possibilities which expression afford us we encounter a "flip side" – both the busy-ness of mind engaged in language/thought and the habits or strong tendencies with which this expression is frequently imbued and which limit language's apparent freedom.

We have seen that whether they are more or less useful (i.e., "responsive," "responsible"), more or less detrimental (i.e., "reactive"), habits can be categorised as either unconscious or deliberate – and it might be added that even the most *well*-developed ones may benefit from being open to revision. (Even the best of driving habits does not exempt one from remaining alert.) In either case, mindfulness practice is a means dedi-

cated to promoting this opening. Mindfulness meditation cultivates, and mindfulness in itself *is*, the quality of pure attention which has been variously implied and described in the foregoing. Such a practice begins to dislodge our preoccupations, as we have seen earlier. But through it the nature of our ingrained tendencies to move, respond, react, think (and so on) in certain ways become increasingly apparent and open to our questioning in their midst, open, that is to their *interrogation.*

Sandra: I would say that in the last few years it's made me so much more aware of areas of my own self, of areas that were a part of me. I thought I knew myself, pretty well, and I think it was the last retreat I can remember being *so* frustrated and annoyed about a person's behaviour, who was a dear, dear friend. And I thought, "why is this picking at me so, these things?" And... *jealousy* kept coming up. I thought, "But I'm *not* a jealous person!" It certainly made me aware of the specialness of who this person was. And once I saw this it was gone. Such a wonderful feeling of *relief*, of understanding.

Moments of gaining self-understanding in this way are often shared by meditators. It would seem that attitudes which go unnoticed in normal waking life can become increasingly apparent, palpable to mindful attention. Sometimes it is described as being like "peeling an onion." Sandra observes this gradual lifting way of old attitudes, which in this case are relational in nature. Commenting on the experience of space, Bollnow remarks germanely that "[w]here the spirit of envy and rivalry take hold" of us a "painful narrowness and friction" are experienced.[27] Sandra's accustomed sense of self has been disturbed in this way by inner agencies of the practice, which is to say her continued willingness to attend to her experience. The relief Sandra expresses is a frequent theme, as if the assumptions we carry or embody have actual bearing, weight. *The lifting of habit is a release.*

Meditation as Disciplined Resistance

> *Meditation does not simply involve being at peace with the world. On the contrary, confronting the self can be like walking into a raging storm.*[28]
>
> *Q: What is your advice to new practitioners?*
> *A: The same as for the old practitioners! Keep at it.*[29]
>
> – Achaan Chah

We have seen that the experience of mindfulness is an alert knowing of what is presently happening. Its presence and (in reflection) absence are readily observable, familiar.

Right now I'm staring at a computer screen *at these words*. I can hear the steady hiss of the air conditioning system to my right, cast a glance out the window and notice the campus and cars beyond. If someone were to rap on the door I'm certain I would hear them and be able to respond. It would be impossible to function in life without a modicum of this capacity for attention. But unless it becomes impaired or unreliable it may not be something to which we *give* much attention. On reflection, we may consider ourselves fairly mindful by virtue of our being aware of our surroundings, by the fact that we aren't succumbing to day-dreaming or nodding off at work. Conventionally regarded, mindfulness may be equated simply with being awake rather than asleep or unconscious. But the experience of mindfulness can deepen considerably beyond this to an acute state of light and profound *wakefulness* to the textures of moment-to-moment experience. The meditative practice we are examining here aims at its cultivation. How?

Well, how is anything "practised"? A person practising to be a good driver, or violinist, must repeatedly drive or play the violin. Aiming at the cultivation of such wakefulness, then, in the disciplined technique of mindfulness meditation one practises it by deliberately placing or resting the attention on this moment-to-moment experience. When, as earlier described, our practice is very awkward, we say we are in the process of learning, "still practising," as if we will eventually transcend this need.[30] But notice that this word permits a curious extension beyond the rudimentary acquisition of a skill, as when someone is identified as a "practising surgeon." We would properly expect of this person comprehensive and highly refined technical abilities. Yet even here, one's skills are honed through continual practice. Similarly, mindfulness meditation is an activity in which mindfulness is "practised" – in all its connotations. Aiming to increase the "intensity and quality of attention,"[31] mindfulness is practised by placing the attention on – being mindful of – momentary experience. Whether an experienced meditator or one just now beginning, one cultivates mindfulness through practising it. With the sometimes intense modulations which can occur in one's experience during the course of a retreat as well as differences among meditators' experiences owing, for instance, to temperament and how "well practised" one is, it is important to inquire further into the nature of, and consequences of participating in the discipline of mindfulness meditation.

Elected silence, sing to me
And beat upon my whorled ear...[32]

– Gerald Manley Hopkins

The consequences of being actively situated in this environment tend both to follow certain generic patterns and to be entirely individual. The meditator in retreat is temporarily freed from the usual responsibilities and actions of a busy working and family life, and even many of those common aspects of social discourse that would normally figure in group activity. In their place, he or she simply sits and walks, eats, sleeps, dresses, washes and so forth, all the while attending as closely as possible to the sensations of the body, and the various ideas, emotions, memories which from one moment to the next comprise her or his experience. This mindfulness can certainly extend to others in relation to whom silence is being maintained. As we have seen, silence tends to interrupt our habitual moves of relating to others, rendering our urges to speak more distinct and, thus, prompting new forms of understanding regarding others, and self.

Sandra: Mostly I do feel comfortable with it. I don't talk a lot, as a person. Sometimes I think there's a bit of a *strain* to the silence, where I'd just like to say "oh shit!"(*chuckles*) Like when everybody's eating quietly – creates a bit of tension sometimes... but it's certainly beneficial for tasting your food.

James: I've always been troubled by people who seem to have trouble stopping talking for a couple of days. Personally, it never seems difficult to stop doing it.

PH: The interior dialogue as well?

James: No, I wouldn't say that. I'm chattering away to myself pretty much the whole time. But I don't have any difficulty stopping speaking. And I get impatient in fact with people who do have trouble because I don't have much sympathy with the fact that they need to speak so much.... Silence is a rest, too. It interrupts the routine, or in my case the sort of chaos of life.

Carl: Silence is kind of a double edged sword: if you don't do it you don't realise the benefit of it and if you don't know the benefit of it you don't do it, so it's a very difficult thing to get started. Having practised silence in retreats now I realise the benefit of it; it's not a question of having to do it, it's what I *want* to do.

The relationship between speech and others in retreats is reversed. Although in the presence of other people quite intimately – group meals, walking by one another in the halls, the proximity of sitting cushions in the meditation room, the long hours – silence,

rather than our customary talking, is established as the norm. These meditators each reveal that silence may not come easily to the group. After all, we are used to inquiring after others, explaining ourselves, offering comment, and so on, when in the company of others. But in this context words are very few, and all of them agree to its value. Indeed, speaking often seems to be experienced not so much a presence, in retreats, as it is an "absence of silence." Meditators expect to find it in retreats, and find the prevalence of language a distraction. When does one, as Carl observes, "realise the benefit of silence"? Moreover, even when the discipline of it does not present a real challenge, another dimension of silence is evident. Although James regrets it when silence is broken in retreats he admits to the persistence of internal dialogue. We might ask, is *keeping* silence the same as *being* silent?

At first – as with all features of practice – it can be experienced as an "external" matter, something that one needs to be alert to: something that one *does*. Perhaps in this context it is the negative component, "not talking," which is most manifest – when words are kept in check. Maybe it is this burdensome weight or strain which Sandra sometimes finds uncomfortable, like a taut, pregnant silence. With practise, however, silence tends to become easier, its positive characteristics more deeply absorbed into one's experience. As M.F. Sciacca writes:

> Silence has a weight... that we do not find in any word: it is heavy with everything that we have lived, are living now and everything that we shall experience.... A whole life is gathered into a moment of silence.[33]

In the sense in which Sciacca portrays it, silence has attained a positive agency, a gentle resonance. It goes beyond a mere absence of speech to achieve a rich inner stillness. Instead of being yet another element of practice to make effort towards, there is now an effortlessness to it. In this case, the silence achieves an agency of its own; that is, it becomes something one *is*.[34] The next conversation raises some of these dimensions of silence, and grapples with what it is that makes silence truly *silent*.

Sarah: I don't have much problem with other people talking, but I do have a problem if I start talking too much, and joking.

PH: Really, what kinds of talking? any kind?

Sarah: I don't know. Talking with Peter or you, that's not a problem. But if we're in the group there tends to be laughter, and... see, I don't *know* what that is, but it's certainly been an issue for me. Any kind of conversations I have, if I then try to sit down and meditate, then I have a lot of that going through my head. But in terms of the pounding in my heart and staying

awake, it isn't that there's ideas going on, it's just that my total physiology....

PH: ... so, the silence sort of *continues* in some types of conversation?

Sarah: Yeah, it *must* be something like that. Certainly if I sit and talk about something with you or with Peter... we'll *laugh* about things as well, and yet when I leave *that* experience and go back to sit or got to bed, or whatever, there isn't a problem. But it's the... I don't know if it's the *group* talking and joking...? I haven't investigated it that carefully.... Joking around the tea area at night – that's a typical experience. Maybe it's calling on that kind of challenging part of me to be out there as opposed to just talking quietly about something that makes a difference. I don't know, I should look at that carefully.

PH: Well, I've noticed this too, in myself – that certain types of banter come up and you feel you need to *respond* to stay in that kind of dialogue. It isn't always very comfortable, to be honest.

Sarah: So you're having to draw on something different than when you're sitting?

PH: Yeah. And one of the things that's different is that I need to "construct" my self again.... I guess there's a sort of "defensiveness" – even if it's lighthearted – but in order to engage in *that* in the proper sort of spirit I have to *be* someone in relation to others, again.

Sarah: That's very helpful... that's *very* helpful. That really... that's exactly what it is. For me, I would have to be that person who's out there in the world to do that. Whereas here, I'm trying to, well, *be me* – but *clear* about what is going on inside....

Our exchange turns upon the qualities not of silence so much as of speech as it bears upon silence. Some talking leaves one feeling exposed before others and, as it were, "disturbs the peace." Other forms of talking seem to contain something of the stillness of silence within them. Laughter is also implicated in this, where we can differentiate between laughter *at* and laughter *with*. Conversation entails a "turning with" (*con-versāre*) and in the context of retreats it can be suggested that silence can be present or engaged within such speech – even laughter which is "good humoured." Sarah (and I) finds silence valuable because it allows her to see herself clearly, or rather, to *be* herself. Her observations imply that consciousness of oneself with others can unsettle our sense of who we are. Perhaps speaking, in this context, expresses the awkward experience we sometimes have of being objectified – in Sartre words, of "being-there-for-others" or "as a body know by the Other."[35] The silence of retreats can act to soften this angular, objective experience of selfhood. Just as silence itself becomes transformed from what one does to what one is, one's active need to be *some*-one can modulate into a simple atten-

tiveness to *being*.[36] Some of these characteristics are evident in observations of retreat experience by the poet Rona Murray:

> In silence, we listened to the wind storm in the oak trees, to the seagulls, the sea, to bones cracking in a walking, naked foot, to water poured in a jug. In silence we listened to people shucking off their pain during breathing exercises. In silence, we grew to know and support each other, perhaps more intimately than in speech since through words we indicate country of origin, education, family background, even age and class and other classifications that have little to do with the core of ourselves....[37]

Among other things, these remarks indicate, it is not only the presence or absence of speech, but the fact that language entails our relations with others, which is implicated here. What other relational modes inhere in retreats when it is not silence, per se, but the presence of others which is apparent?

Janet: Well, *inspiring*. I'm sitting across from Sophie, Pamela and you, and sometimes it has been *so* hard to sit through what I'm getting through. And I open my eyes and look at the three of you and it's like three rocks. So that's being inspired – I can go back to it, then. Even last night, during group sharing, when I said there was sadness. After that I felt so many people touch – they didn't touch me but they "touched" me... that support. It was an amazing feeling, like I was being held up.

PH: So the group is important?

Janet: Oh, absolutely. I learn a lot at meal times watching how kind everyone is to each other. That's one of the greatest places of learning. There's such gratitude. There's gratitude for the simplicity of the place, care of food.... It's just overwhelming. *Well* – I was watching Margo walking on the first day and was in tears thinking about all the footsteps she'd put on the carpet, that built up, so when I take a footstep there are all of those before me.

Dennis: Oh yeah, the group provides support. Restlessness, tiredness... often in a group you feel more compelled to persevere. Practising when you know some people are really struggling with their issues – that can be inspiring.

Clearly, the silent witnessing of one's own experience in harmony with a group can lead to a subdued – sometimes a very remarkable – appreciation for the efforts of others. It is as if, being engaged in a group undertaking permits the necessary rigours of discipline to be shared. There are times during which the presence of others – their continuing resolve, apparent struggles or just the fact they are there – is a tremendous support. "Like rocks"... this curious expression might be interpreted variously: perhaps as mute passivity, solitude, utter indifference. But Janet seems to discern a helpful quality of groundedness, here. Dennis finds similar encouragement in the face of restlessness and

struggle. In these case, too, it is not precisely the absence of movement or perceived distraction which meditators respond to, but what might be called a bodily silence. Watching a meditator walking or eating, this inner silence is sometimes quite *audible*. Meditators' experience of other-as-support is to experience comparison in a rejuvenating manner, as when jangled attention is stilled by one's appreciative look at another – in a word, by *respect*. But this kind of support is not a given.

Sandra: I think one of my dilemmas for the longest time was sitting with these other people, thinking there are these wonderful things happening in their minds – meanwhile, *I* can't *breathe*. (*laughs*)

In the face of some taxing challenge the presence of others may render one's own problems all the more questionable. In some cases, others remind a meditator of her or his distractions or discomfort. Sometimes this can be encouragement, at other times it might confirm a sense of one's unsuitability to the practice: *what's wrong with* me? In such cases, others are not discouraging, exactly, but the comparative element present in the previous instance seems inverted, such that, rather than the possibility of ease or encouragement to forebear, it is one's *struggling*, which becomes more pronounced. How *this* becomes worked into one's practice cannot be foreseen.

Modes of Discipline

Whether encouraged by the silent diligence of others or caught up in some form of seemingly unique difficulty, the strength of mindfulness is experienced to increase gradually with such practice, especially when a degree of what may be referred to as "continuity" is maintained. Continuity of practice emerges naturally out of many factors. Fundamentally, though, it is cultivated by a meditator's willingness to attend with dedication to each moment of experience. In other words awareness is directed not only towards the sensations of the breath during sitting practice, or to the steps while walking, but to the precise movements with which one rises from her meditation pillow to begin to walk, or takes off his now-too-warm sweater, eats his salad or brushes her teeth. This widespread, detailed application of attention – where all objects of experience are equally eligible for mindfulness – not only deepens the clarity of sitting or walking practice in particular, but makes a meditation of the retreat as a whole.

The deliberate component of the practice – that is, practice as *discipline* – comes as one mindfully attends to this experience, and then consciously brings attention back to the breathing, the walking and so on. This is not always easy. In fact, during some periods in people's practice this disciplined mindfulness towards the momentary stuff of experi-

ence can be rather grueling, painful. There are periods which can feel as if they might extend into eternity, in which fatigue, restlessness, self-pity, boredom or chagrin prevail, making the discipline of "sitting through it" very unpleasant indeed. Each variety of discomfort seems to carry with it distinct experiential qualities for the meditator:

Sarah: Often there's confusion. I was confused all morning, yesterday. I didn't know what to *do*, how to do it, grasping at technique to deal with what looked like *mud*, oatmeal and stuff... and pain, and not knowing what to do with it.

Sarah compares her meditation to a heavy, sticky mass. How is she to continue; what should she do? Her meditation is not "getting anywhere." "Not knowing what to do..." At some stage – during *many* stages, perhaps – meditators find themselves in the thick of such difficulties, trying simply to be aware of them, until the buffeting of tangential concerns becomes too insistent – *why is this happening? what am I doing wrong? what does it all mean? why hasn't that nice meditation I was having yesterday returned?* I can still hear a teacher under whom I have often meditated, Achan Sobin, reminding us in his densely Thai-accented English:

> Don't care about liking it or not liking it. Just let it go. Like, not like – *not your duty*. Meditators' duty to observe "rising," "falling," observe walking steps, observe what is happening *in the present moment*. Remember: you look after mindfulness and mindfulness will look after of you! And if you lose the moment that's okay, too – just begin again.

Just begin again.... Now, it may very well be that even while *reading* of my "soup meditation," earlier, some of this boredom or restlessness may have been encountered. But to understand in more concrete detail what meditative discipline is and what it provokes an illustration may be helpful. It could be stated in this way: *Meditative technique begins with the cultivation of psychophysical quiet through a radical slowing down of bodily movement and the deliberate arresting of the attention on discrete features of one's moment-to-moment experience*.... Yet such explication may seem rather remote so I shall begin again, in more familiar terrain.

A Hermeneutic of Resistance

It is important to observe that among other things meditative practice produces a gradual "deceleration." As such, several aspects of the phenomenon of movement become evident, rather as we notice the landscape changing according to the speed at which we travel. (Were we to consider this "objectively," we would expect the landscape to remain the same regardless of the speed of passing vehicles. But it is our view, our subjective

experience, of it that is in question here.) In a plane we look over a vast terrain of colours, lines and undulation; depending upon our height, some large objects may be distinguishable but our eyes won't pick up anything too fine. While speeding along in a car our horizon may be reduced but much more detail is seen. We attend to other cars, the buildings and trees away from the road. We experience being in the middle of things to a far greater extent. But notice that our perceptual attitude looks out – *over* the things nearest us, to those signs and landmarks we need or wish to "take in." While our rate of travel may be experienced as very sedate, in a plane, it tends to be our distance above things that is most apparent. In a car, though, it is our speed *through* them which is the primary condition for perception. This is especially evident, as Bollnow observes, on a highway.[38] The faster the car is moving, the further advanced the driver's attention needs to be. And unless a passenger is looking *far* into the distance, even the view directly to the side can be disorienting, since things no sooner arise into view than they fall away. Needless to say, no one but perhaps an inquisitive child will for very long look straight down at the road: since it's all a blur, there's nothing to see – anyway, it will just make you lightheaded.... Predictably, this changes markedly for the bicyclist, and even more for the pedestrian, each of whom experience more generously (whether or not they wish it) the dense particularity of the world through which they move. Even the walker will need to cast an eye slightly ahead, on occasion, but it is no trouble, now, to look down at the grass or stones or pavement underfoot, and (unless she is hurrying to get somewhere) should something catch her eye, it is a simple matter to pause for a moment.

It is not only our experience of space but of time which is affected by these alterations; although whether one can *enjoy* the pedestrian pace of the side-road or path depends on may things, for the experience of temporality is anything but uniform. For instance, J.H. van den Berg observes how, during a walk (it works for any mode of travel) the "time" and "length" of the road vary according to one's pace, impatience, the time of day, and so on.[39] Nevertheless, if some value is attached to observing the pathway, or viewing with care – or at some length – those objects which are situated nearest to it, walking can even become a form of *expedience*.

The discipline of meditation may in this sense be likened to the deliberate use of walking over other modes of travel. It means that we consent to slowing down our pace. Whether one flies or drives or walks is a matter of practicality, cost, patience. To walk when a great distance needs to be covered could be tedious, exhausting and, these days,

quite unnecessary. Yet, and this is more to the point, to walk slowly when we would rather walk briskly, run when we would prefer to ride a bike, take a bus to work – with its endless stopping – when we are used to the car, can all promote some frustration, resistance in us with having to move less quickly than we would like. In meditation, our normal (read: "habitual") rates of doing things are rendered questionable by being slowed down. In their place is a deliberate focussing of the attention upon the discrete actions of which movements are comprised. The pace of movement is consciously delimited by the meditative discipline – walking with three steps: *lifting, moving, placing;* walking with six steps: *raising, lifting, moving, lowering, touching, placing,* and so on. Where intentional physical motion is not at issue, the attention is similarly placed, first, on a set structure of sense experiences (the rising, falling sensations of the abdomen as one breathes, for example) and, second, on whatever else emerges to displace these (thoughts, pains, etc.). Whether deliberate or "random," each experience in its particularity is permitted, or integrated, within the structure of practice – one by one.

At times, an impatience can develop around the scrupulous occupation of the attention with moment-by-moment experience – even on retreat, where on the face of it there is nothing *else* one is to be doing. (That is, walking needn't be *pleasant.*) Time slows, drags, or, while time moves apace we slow down and drag our heels while trying to maintain the attention on what may seem like the most mundane of mundane things: the breath, the moving of one foot, the moving of another, the sound of a door, the sound of a cough. In this way, the mindful occupation of the present is *willed* through meditative discipline. But sometimes it is the quality of resistance itself which becomes the most conspicuous feature of attention. At such times one's participation in the process may become questionable, even, in a sense, *unwilling*. This discipline, which with practice becomes increasingly less deliberate, provides the pronounced deceleration so characteristic of mindfulness meditation. In this way we can speak of meditative discipline as entailing a braking motion, a willed resistance. With it can come an experience akin to friction.

Sandra: A lot of my difficulty in retreats is around *breathing*. This time again, too.

PH: Oh, okay. What happens when you observe it?

Sandra: Well, I find I hold my breath. If I *say* the word (*i.e., labelling: "rising," "falling"*) then I have to breathe to synchronise with the words. And if the breath is shorter than the word, there is a gasping to get it into a rhythm.... But once I got in touch with the pain itself, the... the physical pain seemed to go. It was all connected, I think, with the breathing and I

think some of my breathing problems – rhythm, holding – have got to do with emotional pain: sadness, deep stuff.

PH: What happens then?

Sandra: It certainly made me realise that there's a lot of suppression of pain – emotional pain – and once I allowed myself to be with the pain, then the physical pain disappeared.... I realised from what was coming up with various instances in my life that I haven't allowed myself to *feel* pain.

The resistance which Sandra raises is striking in part because it touches upon a movement which for most of us, much of the time, carries on by itself. She does not have a respiratory condition; yet, here, Sandra's breathing can become laboured, unnatural. Her conspicuous breathing seem much like the clumsiness that can overtake someone running down stairs when he suddenly "stops to think" of what his feet and legs are doing. What normally goes unnoticed is awkwardly apparent. Having encountered this before and shared the problem with teachers she is aware that to be "mindful" of breathing is not to *control* it. Even so this ungainly struggle has ensued. Although some forms of discomfort are ameliorated simply by changing position, Sandra's cannot be avoided.

In its deliberate, conscious dimension, wherein our customary actions and attitudes become *evident* ("unnaturally" so), mindfulness can at times acquire this quality of painful resistance. Sandra's arrhythmic breathing seems to have become separate from her, an object with which she struggles and which resists her, in return. But something changes as she gets in touch with her experience. The problematics of breathing seem to vanish as a deepening awareness of pain emerges, one in which she *re*-members its textures, dense with emotion. Where is the resistance in practice situated? "Once I allowed myself to be with the pain...." We breathe easily when the presence of our breathing is not apart from us, is accepted. Sandra's reflections suggest, likewise, that the struggles in practice arise in tandem with our resistance to being mindfully present to the subtle and more urgent rhythms of living. *To be mindful is to be open to what is present as given.*

Sitting with silent attention to the particulars of psycho-physical experience undermines habitual attitudes, and may position one face to face, as it were, with memories and emotions long-forgotten. In doing so it can make of our internal environment something of a "hothouse" where our experiences are less avoidable, somehow more apparent to us, than is normally the case. (Imagine walking all day in the hot sun – you'd rather not *be there.*) But – and here the "therapeutic" element – meditators frequently come through or resolve especially difficult patterns of experience by means of attention, perseverance, and patient acceptance of what happens to be occurring. In such cases understanding

may emerge towards a vexing, hither-to insoluble concern. The pressing constrictions of space, the slow abrasive friction of time, suddenly abate – moments like this are a relief, of course, but they also tend to be accompanied by a sense of freedom and newness.

And somewhat distinct from such catharsis, meditators also report experiences in which simple ease or joy arises: moments of calm which radiate well-being, or brim over with delight and good-will. They point to the possibility that buoyant and refined interest can develop in practice simply in regards to what, presently, *is*. Although perhaps less dramatic than the cathartic experiences, they are potentially no less momentous in that they may prompt a gentle and sometimes fundamental reflection upon one's past and a refocussing upon the present.

When Mindfulness Becomes 'Practised'

PH: Why do you mediate?

Debbie: Many things come to mind. To better myself, peace of mind. It's something I believe in and believe will help me. Over the years I developed a great deal of faith that if I followed it that it would be good for me. It hasn't let me down. Something in the practice is *good*. There's a softness which comes of the silence and the ease in meditation practice. Once you see something you can let it go.

PH: Can you describe the meditation?

Carl: As I was sitting, I went from having pain in my back – right through my back – and a tightness in this whole part of my body and almost a shortness to my breath and a very unnatural feeling in my breathing, to just a total... it's like I was just totally free to just watch what else was arising. I wasn't busy trying to do something with this breath. There was just a freedom to see what else was arising, and to see other things – emotions, thoughts, whatever. I realised that so much of my attention and so much of my energy was focussed on just trying to breathe right and trying to watch it every time. And in the past I knew I was having that problem, but I couldn't see a way clear to get out of it. This time I just sort of moved to watching the breath at the nose and all sorts of things unfolded for me that I hadn't seen before, like the fact that the out-breath was warmer than the in-breath – I'd never noticed that before. And that was just... something wonderful to see.

PH: hmmm... why "wonderful"?

Carl: Just... to me it was wonderful to see something that... that was *there* all the time when I'd never been aware of it. I think what was wonderful about it was... I *knew* I was seeing something in that moment for what it really was.

Our inquiry into the modalities of silence has acquainted us with the difference between silence which is undertaken as an action, and the agency of *being* silent. As Debbie indicates, with the other dimensions of meditation, too, an *ease* can develop in the practice. Rather like Sandra's experience, above, Carl has encountered resistance within the breathing and has then become aware of this resistance clearing. And like Sandra's his ease is not only bodily and emotional but has a simple but incisive cognitive element: "I knew I was seeing something in that moment for what it really was."

In order to understand the nature of this ease we need to remain a little longer with the phenomenological consequences of undergoing the unique meditative discipline described, in relation to which this easing is experienced. In mindfulness meditation we direct the attention to the ongoing sensations of breathing, the deliberate "steps" of the walking motion. We observe thoughts coming and going without becoming carried away with thinking them. We notice pains flaring up, throbbing or prickling, subsiding or returning. The constantly changing phenomena of our psychophysical experience fluctuate and dissolve, as it were, before our eyes – now gradually, "single file"; now in confusingly rapid, clamorous bursts. Once again, in short, we are confronted at every turn in meditative practice with a hermeneutic of *movement*.

Two conditions at least are simultaneously present in movement – movement and knowing: "moving." (If everything were moving in the same direction at an identical speed no movement could be perceived – but who could ever confirm for us such a state of affairs?) Now add to these a distinctive characteristic of mindfulness practice, the reason movement attains its remarkable evidential force: that there is a *slowing*.

The deceleration entailed in this discipline constitutes one of its salient experiential features. The results of undergoing it differ. As is now clear, the phenomenon of resistance is a conspicuous feature of this slowing. Its experiential dimensions can be perceived alternately: as the struggle of acting against (*tension*) and the struggle of withstanding (*friction*). Meditation, in this sense, can be tough-going. We are *unused* to sitting quietly to observe the breathing; we would much *prefer* to eat our soup at a usual pace, or be free to scratch our nose without first noticing the itch, the intention to scratch, the raising of the hand, and so on. For that matter, we'd like to chat when we feel the urge. The modalities of resistance come into play owing to the mere fact that the meditator is engaged in the practice. To prevent, retard or simply perceive the questionability of doing what we habitually do can be disturbing, unsettling. (Curious that other varieties of motion can be engendered by all this slowing.)

One might ask at this point what is unique about meditation. We have all been aware of lifting an arm, inhaling the breath, a prick of pain, a memory. Surely, that we don't choose to attend to them "meditatively" merely suggests we have more urgent or interesting things with which to occupy our time. Quite so. However meditative activity is contingent on some value being placed on a fine-grained observation of that which lies "at hand" or "under our noses." That is, whatever its ancillary uses might be, its chief importance is as a practice which reveals to us the textures and conditions of experience as they are, rather than as they appear to indifferent, habitual or distracted modes of attention.

Moreover, other consequences than the permutations of struggle are possible within this deliberate meditative slowing. The ease which can arise or settle in the midst of experience can arrive from several directions. On the one hand, it can be seen as a natural product of the increased bodily stillness, of the environmental and interpersonal silence of retreat practice. However, they can as easily, and naturally, elicit the struggles which have been discussed at some length.

Seen more acutely, this easing of experience emerges in resonance with the functioning of mindfulness in its most rudimentary sense. On its own, mindfulness is a *bare* attentiveness, its "touch," if it is fitting to speak of attention making contact with something, is exceedingly light, tactful. As experiences in a subtle and discrete sense become apparent to it, we might attribute to the agency of mindfulness an inherent *discretion*. While discrimination, discernment, comparison, and so on, are important cognitive abilities they all rely on this unadorned, "pure," ability of mindfulness to observe what is before it.

> *Sylvia*: In meditation... there's nothing you can really compare it to. The world is goal oriented – you have to meet deadlines... decisions, tasks are always requiring attention. Inevitably when you sit you carry this mindset with you. In the world, if you do something you get a tangible result, but meditation's not like that. It's *just there*.... It's just there. It just *presents* itself.

It's just there... Here, as so often, we meet with the distinction of inner/outer. But Sylvia also alludes in her comments to a deepened sense of presence where this distinction has subsided. Accompanying the development of ease is a modulation of effort. Gradually one's practice can achieve a patience, as the inherently accepting nature of "bare attention"[40] is permitted to function on its own, and gathers strength. It is in the presence of

such a lucid attention, one which does not stick, resist, or become involved with experiences as they arise and diminish, that a palpable *ease* can emerge in meditation. During such moments, both the disciplined effort entailed in the placing and replacing of attention, and our countervailing resistance to this discipline, are suspended.

Janet: I haven't been feeling in my skin since about Christmas... just didn't know what it was about. And when it came up here there was all that pain and all the sadness, and rage – just pure rage – and then more sadness and then some specific things, and then just general suffering. Layers.

PH: In that order?... you seem very clear on the order.

Janet: Yeah, first the sadness... then, in the end there was this wonderful freedom. Liberation, energy.

PH: Was there a time when the shift occurred?

Janet: Yeah, late this afternoon. The interview with Peter helped it shift. I find the interview always *does* help the shift.

PH: Okay, you're sitting this afternoon, after you'd talked to Peter... how do you feel the turning beginning to occur?

Janet: I was *with* the rage, there was the rage and then there was the suffering and with the rage there was *so* much energy. The rage wasn't focussed... there was... *the birds* were chirping too loudly. That's what got me started yesterday too, the birds – little things like that. And then today there was just pure rage. But it wasn't specific like the sadness. And then the energy *released*.... It's a *very* big thing....

PH: ... so, the rage or the great pain... it's transformed by watching?

Janet: It's like totally black, these places that were totally black and then a light pierces. Then you know that light's going to come through, eventually.... You know, even in that deep, deep time of suffering today, there was still *curiosity*.

The struggles that have been discussed in much of the foregoing have related to the frictions and tensions generated from meditators' responses to the slowing of this practice. Janet's difficulties, though, have not been initiated by her meditation in the same way; their genesis (to the extent they *have* one) is situated elsewhere. She does not describe a contest so much as the honest ordeal of *being present*. Here, we see quite clearly the *passion*-ate nature of suffering, whose agency lies outside the purview of one's will. A courage and deep-seated consent, which are quite evident in Janet's words, have been directed towards remaining mindful of *what* has been happening – its particular tones, layers, densities, and so on. Moreover, we see once again a profound easing has coincided with what might be called a deepening of presence – "I was *with* the rage...." The remarkable quality of this attentiveness is nowhere more apparent than in the alert curiosity which she has enlivened her experience, throughout. Doubtless there are many

other attributes which this meditator has brought into the practice, but this spirited capacity to remain light in the presence of such trials has surely contributed to the release she eventually gains. It is as if a quiet, innate ease which was unnoticeable in the presence of such anguish had finally attained its own clear voice.

Like, not like – not your duty... Remembering again the words of my meditation teacher, care needs to be exercised that this ease not be viewed as "better" than the experiences of resistance. (That it is *easier* to experience may be true, but tautological.) In fact, our general ("natural") preference for one over the other is inherent in the very struggles that we undergo; that is, insofar as we contend against the honest particularity of what is happening. The difference between the modalities of resistance and their easing is precisely this profound willingness or consent to observe whatever it is that arises to mindful awareness. One's attitudes towards present experience achieves, in this sense, a permissiveness. The ease of practice arises of its own accord when there is a diminishment of the expectation that things be otherwise than what they are. Patience, consent are noteworthy, here. But neither can emerge where there has not been a simple willingness to allow the grammar, or agency, of practice to develop. Struggles, when well-practised, can become easy. Understood in view of the hermeneutic of movement, ease in this context is not a stopping, but a *stilling*.

Insight: *'So THIS is what happens'*

> *It is better to see the face than to hear the name.*
>
> – a Zen saying

In the detailed Buddhist organisation of meditative praxis, mindfulness (*sati*) meditation is understood to cultivate "insight," or *vipassanā*. For this reason the retreats and forms of meditation described in this chapter are often called *"vipassanā* retreats," "insight meditation," and so on. Yet for all its currency in the environment of these retreats, what does "insight" refer to? In the next chapter we will examine the context in which *vipassanā* is understood in the Buddhist tradition. As an example of this technical context Sobin writes:

> Insight is the essential knowledge required to understand the fundamental truths of existence. It leads to the path of full freedom from clinging. It is direct, non-relative and immediate. It leads to the end of Dissatisfaction. Its essence dispels Ignorance.[41]

Although increasingly aware of such specialised meaning, these days, Western meditators, frequently use the term with more latitude, in keeping with its connoting a "pene-

tration by the understanding."[42] We call a friend "insightful" for her remarkable ability to get to the nub of some vexing concern; perhaps she has had an "insight" into the nature of some dilemma of ours by means of rapid comprehension, or through being around us over time. When an insight is gained some circumstance may quickly become meaningful, or "make sense."

Monica: I think my experience is that they come like a bolt of lightening out of nowhere. Like – "where did that come from?" you know? ... And sometimes I can trace back where my mind was and maybe find the trigger, but often my sense is that so much percolates just under the consciousness that they sometimes appear just to erupt. And I think maybe part of it is that a lot of things that are insights are things you know anyway, on some level. When they surface it's a surprise but then part of me absorbs it again because it was there all the time.... It took a certain setting to bring it out.

Monica's reflections probe tellingly into the nature of this phenomenon. Does it really come *out of nowhere*? Is there a single impetus; do we actually *know* what insights tell us, deep down? The following observations from interviews offer some sense of the meaning and scope of insight in meditative experience. They indicate the presence of several themes, including its suddenness, and the questions of where it has "come from" and what "happens to it" subsequently.

Out of the Ordinary

Mindfulness meditation, we have seen, is a disciplined practice in which one becomes occupied with momentary experience in all of its particularity. With its emphasis upon bare attention, meditation is not so much a looking *for* as a looking *at*. The aims of the practice may inform one's motivations to begin it, but (as meditation becomes "well-practised") such aims tend to be silent within the practice itself. Nevertheless, confronted with experience in all its variety, the meditative attention does have a searching, interrogative quality, in that routine or habitual attitudes become evident and questionable under its open gaze. More accurately, that is, rather than experiences being actively, discursively questioned, they *become* questionable. Bare attention simply observes this experience, these habits, as they are – without an agenda.

Insights offer a fresh view of experience-as-perceived. Their agency is not willed by the meditator. When they arise, they exceed one's expectations and can for a time lie outside of a meditator's abilities to fathom them or to integrate them readily into what is usual. On the other hand, as Monica has suggested, above, insights may not be regarded to be

new, or their novelty may not immediately be recognised for what it is. In what sense are insights surprising? new?

PH: When it arises, do you think insight is a surprise?

Chloe: No, because when it's happened to me I almost don't know that it's happened. For me, it's like it comes and you see it, and you feel it and... only when it goes do you know that it really happened. So you really don't know... you're not really *surprised* when it happens because it's done before you even have a chance to say "heh, I'm in it – this is happening!" So, I think it sort of catches you off guard. I think it caught me off guard whenever they happened to me. It just seems to come into your... well it's almost like a little picture outside of you. It's like it was always there. And then it's gone in a flash and then you realise it was an insight. It's quite a strange thing.

Peter: Right, and I've seen it happen both ways, where, coming around a corner you encounter something that's startling and obvious. Other times it's more gradual, like with ticking away of mindfulness over some extended period of time allows the skin to be shed.

Sophie: Surprises? Not that I can *think* of. It's interesting you should ask that. I don't think so. I haven't noticed anything that surprises me because everything is just coming and then going again. I could tell you what I told someone, earlier in the retreat. (*Her voice catches with emotion.*) At a retreat years ago I was sitting across from him, and I opened my eyes and all of a sudden he was sitting in *sunlight*, and a woman was sitting next to him and there was no light on *her*, but it was just shimmering.... I was telling him the other night, this is why it's so fresh in my emotion. But *that* really... surprised me. I thought: "What is this? What could that be?" (*laughs*) I realised it couldn't be the sun but it was just like a frame of sunlight around him.

PH: It brings up emotion....

Sophie: Yeah... you see, usually I like to get a hold on my emotions. I think ever since I was a child I put a lid on my emotions....

PH: It seems there was something exceptionally striking about it... about the *beauty* of it perhaps?

Sophie: Yeah, I never thought of it as beautiful, I thought of it as *amazing*. Something I hadn't experienced before, something that wasn't reality in the way I would expect reality to be.

PH: It didn't fit in.

Sophie: No... you know when the sun is shining but when there's no sun where does the light come from? So the mind couldn't grasp it.

PH: It... *touched* you?

Sophie: Well it touches me to *talk* about it. It didn't touch me at the moment because it was so *unusual*.

SURPRISE! The birthday party exclamation does not announce anything anomalous, never-before seen, but loudly ushers in a break in a routine. The party itself has its own regular elements – a cake, friends, music – but its surprising element is its sudden and unexpected beginning. Sometimes these elements are so sudden that the surprise is shocking. Insights may not strike meditators in this way. While the surprising fact *that* something has happened is normally what catches us off guard, with insights it is often more the issue of *what* is happening that is of importance.

Clearly, insight's characteristics are not easily described. Chloe does not normally find insights surprising. It is only on reflection that she has been surprised that one has happened; its "content" has not surprised, but has impressed, her. Perhaps Sophie's remarks assist us in this: when well-practised mindfulness generates a generous *presence* – "everything is just coming and then going again." We have seen that this is a mark of bare attention. In this way, consciousness of the meaningful content of an insight is not experienced as "remarkable." Accordingly, the sudden dilation of attention which I have often associated with wonder, in preceding chapters, is not evident here because attention is already open.

In Sophie's account of this surprising sight there is more (rather than less) at work than common surprise: she has been *amazed*. Perhaps in such a case we can speak of an arresting convergence of the fact that something has happened with the characteristics of what has happened. But in several ways her remarkable recollection seems to point to the reverse experience of those Chloe has shared. It *was* a surprise, and its visual and highly emotional content, although distinct, seems *not* to have had a cognitive content. I don't wish overly to probe in this instance, but shall attempt to lend some support to what might otherwise be viewed an anomaly (or less). If its importance, for Sophie, must be measured as an achievement of cognition that can be articulated and applied elsewhere in her life it might be difficult to show why it merits our attention. Even these many years later its "meaning" appears to remain unknown to her. However if meaning can only be so-determined by an instrumental content we may miss the very point to which Sophie has all along been alert, and "true" – *that it happened*. What this particular reflection gives voice to, I suggest, is that value may legitimately lie in the veracity of a moment observed. It seems that she has never asked that it be more than it was. And if, as Peter has observed, there are insights which dawn only very gradually on a person, there seems to be no reason that this uncanny sight may not have more yet to say to one willing to listen.

These remarks are necessarily tentative. But it is just possible that the germination and flowering of some insights exceeds our capacity either to influence or comprehend. Perhaps we encounter, here, a curriculum of patience; if so, it is worth mentioning that the word *sati* ("mindfulness") is derived from the verb "to remember."

From these examples we see that insights may or may not interrupt routine experience. In a sense, though, its routine nature has already been dispelled by the agency of bare attention itself, whose inherently accepting, patient and consenting character constitutes an *openness* to experience. This openness runs counter to habitual attitudes, which are tellingly connoted by the term "mindsets" – that is, attitudes which are definitely settled, have been previously established, and that are routinely, unknowingly, brought into one's present experience. For its part, mindfulness unsettles them.

Notice, therefore, that the hermeneutic of movement continues. Mindfulness is a momentary attentiveness to the ever-changing landscape of experience. The disciplined resistance of the practice and the *dis*-ease which may accompany it is eased in the stilling patience of bare attention: ***a movement is stilled.*** We also see that mindfulness unsettles the routine force of habit to settle into its assumptions: ***a settling is disturbed.*** Insights may be understood to emerge, or erupt, in the space already opened by mindful attention. More inquiry is needed to ascertain the place or function of insight in this hermeneutic. However, they can be considered out of the ordinary in more than one sense – they are both prior to our habitual assumptions and beyond them.

When Everything Fits

The counter-movements of meditative practice – as disturbing as they are stilling – tend to dislodge what is familiar and grounded. Often, however, that which the compelling agency of insight reveals requires duration, maturation, in order to attain the complete grasp of comprehension. As a consequence, patience with the process of meditation is called for. Even so, when time and the circumstances of one's practice permit it, insight can be an experience of disparate elements coming together.

Margo: With the meditation, because it is so moment-by-moment, its like putting a puzzle together; you know how when you start a puzzle you get a little piece up in this corner and another down here and then suddenly there's something in the middle... and these little pieces are kind of all floating around and you don't have a picture. And that's kind of what the meditation is, you have these little things that go "floop" and they flit out and you think you put it aside, and then suddenly out of nowhere there's

something totally different, but it's like all the pieces have been building and it *falls* together.

Sarah: Sometimes for me there's emotion with insights I've had.

PH: Always the same kind?

Sarah: No, there can be joy, there can be sadness, pain – emotional kind of pain and anguish. Certainly *release*: there's been something going on, and then once it gets clear there is a release. Lightness is a good word, there's a lightness. And then to me what seems to happen is that the insight sort of *ripens*. It's like the insight is there and then in thoughts that arise when I'm walking, it's like other things – building blocks – sort of fall into place. So other things that are related to that insight somehow... it's like *"aha*! oh yes, *that's* what happened," and it all goes together.

Teresa: For me... I don't have real flashes like some people have – sometimes I do, but more often the larger process is unfolding: understandings that fit together into a big picture at the end of it all.... And it's bits and pieces that come together. It's fragmented until there's a final piece to the jigsaw, until there's that "aha." The surprise to me is that all of these ideas, or thoughts that have been percolating... they all *fit together* in the end. They weren't separate things. And so somehow it's always amazed me that some process seems to put it all together – there's a thread to it.

In addition to the gradual awakenings of insight, and those instances in which, as discussed above, it is its gentle givenness or presence that is most apparent, the phenomenon of insight can also be remarkable for its suddenness.

Suddenly, out of nowhere.... Again we see that the agency of practice resides beyond (before?) the reach of one's intention or will. And here again we encounter the "surprise" – except that on these cases it has been present, rather than absent. As a consequence we can discern in these reflections not only an appreciation for *what* has become apparent but surprise *that* it is apparent. "Things sort of fall into place...." What is this "that" which surprises? In these reflections it is that the pieces, the disjointed elements of which one is aware, suddenly cohere – or more accurately, they are experienced to be *coherent*. As Teresa observes, it becomes apparent that "they weren't separate things." The resolution of puzzles is sometimes experienced like this – if one tries too hard a problem may not "give"; but with an easing of attention, a lighter focus, a clear solution may unexpectedly come into view. Similarly, most likely everyone has had the experience of trying to recall an elusive name only to have it pop up (out of nowhere) when least expected.

The surprising quality of insight, therefore, is the fact *that*, the moment *when* everything fits. But in addition to this temporal dimension we also see in these reflections that an important spatial referent is revealed, one which pertains to *where* everything fits. The metaphor of the jigsaw puzzle, the "big picture," requires a space in which to be evident. And the realisations that Sarah has experienced – *aha!* – have occurred in just such an open space, or clearing.

In Heidegger's work we encounter significant reference to this clearing. While the enterprise of philosophy tends to focus on the illuminating "light of reason" Heidegger is alert to the fact that light can only shine on things where there is a clear space for them to appear. Light doesn't produce this space but, rather, presupposes it.[43] In the most primary sense, that is, the evidence of things requires an opening, or clearing. Throughout this chapter we have observed that mindfulness meditation cultivates and offers a still and generous space of attention. It might be said that the slowing of practice contributes to its stillness while the patient, accepting or consenting nature of meditative practice allows for its generosity. Our initial interest in Heidegger arose in the context of his profound respect for the wonder to which philosophy owes its beginnings. For him it is this opening – like the clearing in the forest – which is distinctly entailed in wonder's phenomenology, and the impulse which philosophy can never surpass. To quote him again:

> The quiet heart of the opening is the place of stillness from which alone the possibility of the belonging together of Being and thinking, that is, presence and apprehending, can arise at all.[44]

I shall return at the chapter's end to the question of the coherence between wonder and insight. But one other observation of Heidegger's warrants our attention in the context of the last two sections of this inquiry. We have seen that meditation is a praxis, something in which people engage without certain knowledge of its outcome. Our discussion of Sophie's experiences a few pages earlier has raised the possibility that, rather than necessarily presenting indisputable knowledge *about* something, insights may mature or, even, continue to leave their traces simply by having occurred. For his part Heidegger draws our attention to the fact that both the unconcealment (*aletheia*) and concealment of Being occurs in the space of the clearing.

> However, the clearing, the open region, is not only free for brightness and darkness but also for resonance and echo, for sound and the diminishing of sound. The clearing is the open region for everything that becomes present and absent.[45]

We are left with the possibility, therefore, that meditation is a practice which, in addition to cultivating the spaces in which insights can erupt or emerge, may often confront us with the ambiguities which reside at or near to the very heart of things.

How do the insights in question differ from the common occurrences of life? Very little, if at all, in their essential operation: the resolution or comprehension of some problem just beyond our grasp is often experienced when we withdraw, rather than further extend, our reach. Or, having become acquainted with the full and uncomfortable extent of a question,[46] we do not continue to confirm our ignorance but allow understanding to arise in the receptive space which our purposeful attention has cultivated. Although it runs against the current of our expectations it is often observed to be true. If not in this sense how, then, do the "resolved question" and the "insight" vary? Perhaps only in their *extent*, which can be considerable. First, note that true questions no less than their resolutions are mediated by a phenomenological opening. Questions, in their acknowledgement of a lack; resolutions, in their fulfillment of it. However, disciplined mindfulness meditation is a most thorough-going activity of both becoming receptive to the questionability of experience, and remaining open to that which addresses this questioning. The attention is more spacious and still; as a consequence, the experience of understanding can be more profoundly felt. Being profound, it reaches deeper into our lives and has the potential to transform them more fully.

Vision Transformed

We have seen not only that insight can come as a form of surprise but that its arising can actually be missed in that it is happening (one is "in it") before one realises it. Some experiences may elude the construction of a definitive meaning over several decades – are we to think of this as "ripening"? Insights can resemble the sudden or gradual resolutions we experience when the random queries or intimations of which we are aware become whole, when least expected. The impact of any of these insights upon the life of a person will surely vary. It seems that any experience may be fostered through recollection and application, or be forgotten through neglect. Finally, insights – even those which dawn on one over time – have a distinct character and referent. They *mean* something.

Debbie: I always have little insights: "aha!" you know? But one of the biggest insights I had was at the very first retreat I ever went to. It was very intense and I had the insight that the voice in my head planning my life away is not necessarily to be *listened* to. A lot of mindless chatter. I mean, it's still *there* and I still hear it, but that was for me a big insight, not to be letting

that voice construct my *life* for me.... I don't know if I've expressed that well enough.

Beginning with Shelley's experience in the opening pages of this chapter we have often encountered reference to the releasing or lightening quality of insight. Here, Debbie speaks of being released from the presumed reality or authority of this internal voice. Insight has emerged in the space offered by the stilling and clearing of meditation; the light of awareness is struck by what has become present or evident to it. Thus, the "release" might be discerned to function within a phenomenology of space – this voice is now perceived to be separate from who Debbie is. She has been relieved to discover that it is not *her*. It is by virtue of the space that this practice engenders within our normally compact assumptions that insight may expose the questionability which inheres in our experience of identity. Our final interview conversation, Pamela's, enables us to continue this inquiry.

Pamela: Well, you know, there have been so many. But I guess one that I could go back to is when everything came together, and I realised that... we are *all one*. It didn't last very long, but it was a beautiful experience because there was no separation.... It's so hard to talk about something like that, isn't it?

PH: ... one with people, things?

Pamela: Well no, in the middle of meditation I just realised that we're all *one*, the *universe* is one. I mean, I didn't *think* of it like that, it just came to me... I can't really describe it – you can't, Philo, can you? But it was a wonderful experience. (*laughter*) I mean, it's like if you haven't experienced it you don't know what the person is talking about.

PH: It *wasn't* a thought...?

Pamela: Oh no, it wasn't a thought it was something *else*, an actual experience... a *knowing* – that we're all one. Everything. Everything as a oneness.

PH: What did it end up meaning for you?

Pamela: Well, it's very liberating. I felt very benevolent, at ease, liberated.... *Freedom*. There was nothing to accept, or to fight or anything. It was *all there* and it was all being.

PH: ... and in daily life?

Pamela: The experience has never returned. But I've certainly never *forgotten* it! The memory still gives me pleasure... but I don't think that it's not good to sort of *dwell* on these things – experience them and let them go. So I thought, well, since I'd like to experience it again maybe I should just let it go.

PH: Does it give you a sense of confidence?

Pamela: Yes, because I'd never even *thought* of that before, let alone experienced it.

In many ways, it is the lively account Pamela shares here that is most richly attuned to Shelley's initial reflections. We encounter once more the liberating sense of an utterly new understanding breaking in upon and revivifying one's life through the essential (and perhaps, perplexing) "unity" it reveals. And as was so apparent with Shelley, here again we listen to the consequential nature of an insight resounding throughout a meditator's experience. I have already quoted this portion of my conversation with Pamela, but it merits repeating:

> I feel I'm a lot – well, *most* of the time (*laughs*) – a lot more *tolerant* of other people, and of life in general. I find not only more tolerance but *joy* in life. I think because of our attempt to be in the "now" that joy becomes more apparent to us, that things that would have escaped me before I noticed where they were... and so I'm more able to experience more fully because I'm right *there* and not somewhere else. So I think that *is* part of the joy, and also I'm sure that lots of us have had the experience of colour being a lot brighter after a retreat, and everything being more... *alive*, somehow.

As an experience of manifest power this realisation has exceeded Pamela's capacity to express or explain. It has overwhelmed thinking and undermined the grounds upon which life previously made sense. Even much later its revelatory nature has retained something of its compelling, though ineffable, agency. As it turns out, of the themes I wish to reflect upon, each bears upon the conception and nature of identity.

When everything came together...

There was nothing to accept, or to fight... It was all THERE...

Not a thought it was something ELSE, an actual experience... a KNOWING...

Benevolent, at ease, liberated... FREEDOM...

Experience them and let them go...

In her reflections Pamela makes the distinction between thought and "an actual experience," the latter implying a sudden, integral knowing. Deliberate thought, as the determination of experience, has been overwhelmed by a realisation which is novel in the strongest sense: the insight is not freshly, startlingly *composed* of her previous experiences of the world; rather, it has utterly *disposed* her before an ontological fact. Its novelty exceeds life as she has known it. In doing so it has exceeded her. And yet, what does this new form of knowing reveal? Not that she/the world is *other* than this, but that she/it is *wholly this*. In doing so, we might say that the realisation fulfills in a singular manner the distinction Heidegger takes such pains to articulate, that which lies between

the astonishment at the unusual as such, and the true wonder in regards to the unusualness of what is usual. Pamela's experience of there being no essential difference between this and that, self and other, eludes those distinctions which so indisputably occupy our senses and whose function it is language's to name. If the liberation or freedom Pamela has experienced is profound it is because, during those moments in which it was present, the clearing and lightening of assumption that have been expressed on other occasions, in these inquiries, was in this instance *complete*. The experience has been consequential for her not because it has been utilised or "made into something" but precisely because it has been *left to be*. Pamela has sought to be light with its traces, not to grasp them. There is an intuition, here, that holding anything conceptually is to begin to compose reality and, thereby, to reify once again the distinction between self and other which has been dispelled by the experience itself. By remaining true to this realisation, even in its absence, Pamela has effectively maintained the clarity, the opening, of that space within which its call might again be heard. Yet even its echoes have left her awakened to the transforming benevolence this experience has incited.

I return to the hermeneutic of movement. Mindfulness reveals experience to be constituted by habitual motion, and *stills* it; but there is also a settled fixity to habit, which the meditative process *disturbs*. In each case it effectively renders experience noteworthy and palpable. Now we come to insight. In each case mindfulness counters the inertia or current of experience, and perhaps this is the clue needed to comprehend the essential characteristic of insight. Insight can be an interruption. At times, it profoundly interrupts habitual mindsets by the evidential force of that to which one becomes present. In the presence of insight, such mindsets become dispelled or redundant. But there is more: this interruption does not begin or end with "attitudes" if these are conceived as being somehow distinct from us. An attitude connotes our experiential orientation towards, our (em)bodied standing in, life. With no real distinction between them, then, along with these attitudes the recipient – that is, the *subject* – of insight is simultaneously interrupted. We will out of necessity turn to this in the following chapter, in regards to the Buddhist notion of "no-self," but it bears noting here, that the insight provoked by the structure of meditative discipline described in the foregoing is utterly consequential for who it is we think we are, and even more fundamentally, for *what it is we experience ourselves to be*.

Insight, Wonder and the Present Intensified

In order to begin to some tentative conclusions from the foregoing it will be helpful to gather together the principal characteristics of the retreats, meditation and insight with which we have become acquainted in the preceding. These can be summarised as follows:

1) The retreat is a deliberate, social leave-taking, and an environment in which outer and inner silence(s) are encouraged.
2) Mindfulness meditation is the disciplined practice of being fully occupied with the experience of the present moment.
3) Mindful attention reveals a hermeneutic of movement, in which the inertia of habit or assumption is steadily (en)countered.
4) Mindfulness is also a motion, wherein the "unassuming" space of bare attention gradually *opens*.
5) An insight may arise suddenly, or achieve definition more gradually, as its meaning successively dawns within a person's life, and slowly imbues it with vivid new understandings.
6) Insights reveal an agency beyond the deliberate horizon of will, in that they emerge or erupt before that consenting space in which the lived texture of the moment has attained its own (extra)ordinary character.

With these characteristics delineated an important question, largely implicit throughout the preceding, remains: how is wonder to be understood in relation to the forms of attention which are cultivated and evident in the disciplined practice of mindfulness?

We have previously seen that wonder is a dramatic breach of the ordinary in which our habitual attitudes are brought to a standstill. At its most pronounced it offers no escape from a radical discontinuity in which one's experience of the world and, no less, one's identity, are put into question. Being an experience which happens *to* us – in whose thrall we are caught – wonder is a passion that we *suffer*. That which surges forth from out of our lives to confront us in this state is, after Heidegger, the very unusualness of what is most usual. Seeking no ends, with the expectations of will in recession, wonder exposes us to the surprising, disturbing veracity of that within which we perpetually live and act. In the end, we become obliged by wonder to reconsider and renew our manner of living amidst the beings and things which constitute our lives.

Meditative experience is reverberant with these characteristics of wonder. The open space promoted by mindfulness meditation is one in which the evidential nature of momentary experience can become apparent without the overlaying categories of habit that ordinarily attend and configure waking life. Within the mindful, "practised" attention of the meditator, that is, experience can be permitted its essential *priority*. In this unmediated "experience of experience"[47] the mundane, familiar processes which comprise one's lifeworld often attain an unfamiliar tenor. In such instances, the attention has opened to what *is*, and so, one's presence in the present becomes intensified. It is out of this vivid intensification, I suggest, that insight may dawn or erupt into view. Having done so, it can begin to provoke an alert reorientation towards the contours and particulars of life which, to the extent it is absorbed ("lived out," "realised" etc.), accounts for insight's transformative nature.

It has been observed that insight arises both some-*where* and at some-*time*. What conditions conspire to render some moment opportune in this way? The organic metaphor springs easily to mind. In this case, rather than conceiving of a space from which insight emerges, we think of a bud which simply opens, after having been spawned and nourished by the myriad conditions of life. Mindfulness meditation does not simply facilitate these conditions, but *becomes* this openness by virtue of the agencies engendered by the practice itself. Therefore perhaps this, too, captures something of the experience of insight: the incontrovertible, felicitous and timely event of flowering, or fruition.

What I wish to suggest is that wonder can be located at the commodious heart of the meditative processes described here: that it is naturally resonant within the openness of attention developed through the meditative disciplines, and that in its most telling expressions it is synonymous with the perspicuous and consequential vision of insight. To state this more succinctly, mindfulness meditation is a method for promoting wonder; insight is wonder's culmination.

NOTES

[1] Charlotte Joko Beck, *Nothing Special: Living Zen*, ed. S. Smith (San Fransisco: HarperSanFransisco, 1993), 233.

[2] O.F. Bollnow, "Lived-Space." *Philosophy Today*, 5 (1961): 35.

[3] See Max van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press; London ON: The Althouse Press, 1990), 101-06.

[4] Bollnow, "Lived-Space," 36-37.

[5] An elderly Japanese man, recalling his *kensho*, or insight as it is called in Zen Buddhism. Roshi Philip Kapleau, ed. and trans., *The Three Pillars of Zen* (rev. ed. Garden City NY: Anchor Books, 1980), 249.

[6] See Max van Manen, "Practicing Phenomenological Writing," *Phenomenology + Pedagogy* 2, no. 1 (1984): 41, 43.

[7] Ibid., 43.

[8] Along these lines, the overtly therapeutic aspects of insight practice have been explored in Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain and Illness* (New York: Delta Publishing, 1990), which details the methods employed in his stress reduction program at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. Numerous studies in the journal literature attest to the interest in meditation's bearing upon psychological health and potential value to psychotherapy: Joan Atwood and Lawrence Maltin, "Putting Eastern Philosophies into Western Psychotherapies," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 45, no. (1991): 368-82; Greg Bogart, "The Use of Psychotherapy: A Review of the Literature," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 45, no. 3 (July 1991): 383-412; John Engler, "Vicissitudes of Self According to Psychoanalysis and Buddhism: A Spectrum Model of Object Relations Development," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 6, no. 1 (1983): 29- 72; Mark Epstein, "The Deconstruction of the Self: Ego and 'Egolessness' in Buddhist Insight Meditation," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 20, no. 1 (1988): 61-69; Daniel Goleman, "Meditation and Consciousness: An Asian Approach to Mental Health," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 30, no. 1 (1976): 41-54; Jack Kornfield, "Insight Meditation Practice: A Phenomenological Study," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 11, no. 1 (1979): 41-58; Marjorie Schuman, "The Problem of Self in Psychoanalysis: Lessons from Eastern Philosophy," *Psychoanalysis and Contemporary Thought* 14, no. 1 (1991): 595-624; Charles Tart, "Extending Mindfulness into Everyday Life," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* 30, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 81-106; John Welwood, "Vulnerability and Power in the Therapeutic Process: Existential and Buddhist Perspectives," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 14, no. 2 (1982): 125-39.

[9] Mahasi Sayadaw, *Practical Insight Meditation: Basic and Progressive Stages*, (1971; rpt. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1984), and *The Progress of Insight* (1965; rpt. Kandy, Sri Lanka: Buddhist Publication Society, 1985).

[10] Nyanaponika Thera, *The Heart of Buddhist Meditation* (1962; rpt. London: Rider & Co. Ltd., 1987).

[11] Sayadaw U Pandita, *In This Very Life: The Liberation Teachings of the Buddha*, trans. Ven. U Aggacitta; ed. Kate Wheeler, 2d ed. (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1993).

[12] Joseph Goldstein, *The Experience of Insight* (Santa Cruz: Unity Press, 1977).

[13] Stephen Levine, *A Gradual Awakening* (Garden City NY: Anchor Books, 1979).

[14] Particularly in this last feature they may be said to be following the lead of Kapleau's ground-breaking text, *The Three Pillars of Zen*, in which he gives a sensitive, detailed picture of the intensity and importance of the student-teacher relationship in meditative situations and the experiences associated with Zen meditation.

[15] This is true not only of the retreats which concern us here, whose "religious" function may be muted, secondary or secularised, but also of the "retreat" within all religious traditions – whether shamanic, Hindu, Christian, Taoist, Muslim or Buddhist. See Juan Manuel Lozano's article, s.v. "Retreat," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1987).

[16] For an interesting discussion of the "worlds" we inhabit (or do not), see Jerome A. Miller, *In the Throe of Wonder: Intimations of the Sacred in a Post-Modern World* (Albany NY: State Univ. Press of New York, 1992), 79-100.

[17] Conducted in Calgary AB, 6 December 1995.

[18] Van Manen, *Researching Lived Experience*, 102.

[19] Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. A. Hofstadter (New York: Harper & Row, 1971), 161.

[20] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "retreat."

[21] In a similar manner, of the three conditions Philip Koch, *Solitude: A Philosophical Encounter* (Chicago: Open Court, 1994), initially identifies as requirements for "solitude," only "social disengagement" is finally seen to be essential (13-27).

[22] Beck, *Nothing Special*, 221.

[23] John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1987), 1.

[24] Thich Nhat Hanh, *The Miracle of Mindfulness: A Manual on Meditation* (rev. ed. Boston: Beacon Press, 1987), 4.

[25] During one conversation, Janet related this story about a Burmese monk she knew who had been asked to travel to a temple in Chicago: "They offered him plane tickets but he wanted to go by bus. So he comes back and I ask, 'how long was the trip?' And he says, 'three-and-a-half days.' 'Three-and-a-half days... by *bus*? – that must have been *tiring*!'... 'Oh no, they changed the bus driver' (*laughter*). And I thought, it's *how* you *look* at things – he was just so delighted by getting to see everything in the bus that the question of his tiredness didn't even occur to him!" It can be observed that by not wishing to be elsewhere he was expressing one of the dimensions of "mindfulness": acceptance or consent.

[26] Patricia Benner, *From Novice to Expert* (Menlo Park CA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1984), 24. It can be asked whether the levels of experience of meditators can be similarly categorised. We do speak of someone "beginning" the practice and of "experienced" meditators, after all. Benner has applied the Dreyfus model of skill acquisition to nursing practice, identifying nurses as "novice," "advanced beginners," "competent" and "expert." As distinct from beginners, for instance, an expert nurse is one who "no longer relies on an analytic principle (rule, guideline, maxim) to connect her or his understanding of the situation to an appropriate action" (31). Although it might be possible to develop a similar typology for meditators I consider it more valuable, at present, to focus on the characteristics elicited from the practice than to attempt to categorise meditators according to such descriptors. There is little doubt that extensive experience in lengthy retreats can have a bearing on the ease with which a meditator engages in the

practice. But one's experience – the degree of awkwardness, ease, frustration, clarity, etc. – of individual retreats and, for that matter, of particular *days* can vary dramatically. Moreover, it is somewhat ironic that many beginners display a remarkable "aptitude" for meditating (sometimes gained by others only after considerable "experience"), while, at the same time, one's practice thrives with what Shunryu Suzuki has famously termed "beginner's mind." – *Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind* (New York: Weatherhill, 1970).

[27] Bollnow, "Lived-Space," 38.

[28] Kornfield and Breiter, eds., *A Still Forest Pool*, 109.

[29] Ibid., 160

[30] Such stories are legion, of course, but it brings to mind hearing no less a pianist than Vladamir Horowitz remark to an interviewer that if he didn't practise the piano for a day he knew it, if he didn't practise for two days his wife knew it, and if not for a week the public knew it. Pagannini liked to add to the mystique surrounding him by claiming he no longer needed to practice, which led an acquaintance to remark, "but any *child* knows he practises for six hours a day!"

[31] Nyanaponika, *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, 26.

[32] Cited in Rona Murray, "Listening: Out Through the In Door," *Western Living* 25, no. 9 (November 1995): 24.

[33] M.F. Sciacca, *Come si vince a Waterloo* (Milano: Marzorati, 1963), 102; cited in Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London: Routledge, 1990), 105.

[34] This helpful distinction between silence being what one does, and one is, is made in Elizabeth McCumsey's article, s.v. "Silence," *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, in which she distinguishes between environmental, communal, personal and mystical silence(s).

[35] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. H.E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956), 351.

[36] As I understand him, it is in this sense that comparisons with Sartre's views reach an impasse. "Being-in-itself has no *within* which is opposed to a *without* and which is analogous to... a consciousness of itself" (ibid., lxvi); being-in-itself, that is, is non-reflective.

[37] Murray, "Listening: Out Through the In Door," 27.

[38] Bollnow, "Lived-Space," 36.

[39] J.H. van den Berg, *Things: Four Metabletic Reflections* (Pittsburgh PA: Duquesne Univ. Press, 1970), 110-11.

[40] This is a fairly common way of describing this basic characteristic of mindfulness. See, for instance, Nyanaponika's discussion, *Heart of Buddhist Meditation*, 30-45.

[41] Sobin, *Insight Meditation*, 244.

[42] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "insight."

[43] Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, pp. 384, 385.

[44] Ibid., 388.

[45] Ibid., 384.

[46] As Gadamer observes, "A question places what is questioned in a particular perspective. When a question arises, it breaks open the being of the object, as it were" (*Truth and Method*, 362).

[47] A phrase used frequently by the Ven. Madawela Puññaji in our conversations, and found in his paper, "The Ultimate Reality and the Experience of Nirvana."

7

A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

In the last few years a quarterly magazine directed towards the interests and experiences of those often called "Western Buddhists" has been published in North America. It is entitled, *Tricycle: The Buddhist Review*. *Tricycle* attempts to be even-handed in addressing Buddhists of various persuasions: that is, Western Buddhists (and those curious about Buddhism) who may (or may not) trace their "lineages" back to any of the three main traditions: Theravāda, Mahāyāna or Vajrayāna. The heterogeneous chronicle of these traditions (their leading contributors, political and folk influences, philosophical disputes, art, central texts, the waxing and waning of schools and sub-schools) stems from inevitably ramified developments of about 2500 years standing which have occurred among the disparate cultures in South, Central, East and Southeast Asia. Such is the character of our times that this history is now continuing/beginning in the West.

No one knows what will come of it.

Then again, being (mostly) Buddhists, it might be presumed that *Tricycle's* readers don't expect anything *to* come of it, if by "it" one is conceiving of an unchanging, univocal result.... Its sophisticated look and content tends to encourage such asides: the composer, Philip Glass, and writer, Peter Matthiessen, sit on the magazine's advisory board; its writing, photography and artwork are of a high standard. A regular section of the magazine called, "What Does Being a Buddhist Mean to You?" seeks short replies from well-known and unknown Buddhists from varying backgrounds, young and old, to topical questions ranging from the use of cosmetics, to holding down a job, to how best to die. These responses vary.

So complex is the Buddhist tradition; so abundant are its conversations, claims, arguments, iterations, celebrations and silences, that an attempt to situate this presentation is required. Whatever one's expressed intentions, a work always stands or moves within currents of cultural, historical, and personal experiences, and continues to speak to and be addressed by them. And this process doesn't begin only with a completed work, but

is always already at work in the beginning and completing. Being, to use Gadamer's expression, "what happens to us over and above our wanting and doing,"[1] one may as well acquiesce to this. Typical of my status as a Westerner in the late twentieth century, therefore, I am aware of a host of Buddhist perspectives and due to some training, even, have varying degrees of acquaintance with the theoretical and practical approaches of many. However, just as each of the responses to this magazine's questions is personal, so too is my engagement with Buddhist meditative practices sustained mainly by one, rather than a larger number, of such practical orientations. Thus, it is especially to those elements of Buddhist thought and meditative practice which are given prominence within Theravāda Buddhism, and not the diverse and worthwhile perspectives of, say, Jōdo Shin-shu, Madhyamaka, Ch'an, or Nyingma, that will be articulated here. For it is this tradition and its views and techniques which offer the overarching context for my (and others') experiences of meditation retreats that are of concern in this study.

This does not mean that each of the meditators whose reflections have figured in the foregoing have sought or acquired an extensive knowledge of Theravāda Buddhist principles. Some meditators enter into this practice with little awareness of its religious let alone Buddhist dimension. Others may bring an extensive background in different Buddhist systems of thought and training. I do not wish to claim that the perspective I offer is entirely representative of Theravāda Buddhism, or that my interest in other traditions plays no part in my orientation. If such qualifications threaten, in advance, to render this context indistinct, so be it: such are the conditions in which we live.

I will begin with a traditionally informed, if somewhat abbreviated account of the Buddha's life and some observations relevant to our investigations. The historical Buddha is so-named because he became "awakened" (*bodhi*) to the truth(s) of existence and, therefore, liberated from the difficulties inherent in the endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth known as *saṃsāra*. Prior to becoming the "Buddha" he is referred to in Buddhist literature by his birth name, Siddhārtha. The story of his life – the questions and troubles of a young prince, his renunciation of family to take up the wandering life of a north Indian ascetic, his virtuosity in meditation and austerities, his discovery of the "middle path" and consequent enlightenment, the truth he taught – exemplifies for Buddhists a life of singular accomplishment, wisdom and compassion.

Most famous among his teachings are the "four noble truths," in which a medical model is applied to the human condition.[2] All of the Buddha's teaching is predicated on his "diagnosis" that life is (1) inherently unsatisfactory (*dukkha*), on the fact, that is, that we

suffer. For instance, he observed that all of us experience the change and loss of what is dear and, eventually, our own decline and death. Having made this assessment the Buddha proceeded to identify (2) the cause of this suffering to be desire or craving (*taṇhā*). The urge to achieve lasting satisfaction is imbued by an ignorance of the suffering which inheres in one's life. But when one becomes attentive to the depths of this anxiety or dis-ease, the causal function of craving can begin to be identified. Indeed, the extinction (*nibbāna*; Sanskrit, *nirvāṇa*[3]) of the fires of craving will bring about (3) the cessation (*nirodha*) of suffering. In this case, an ease and equanimity are achieved in regards to all of the vicissitudes of experience. The practice which is understood to lead to this definitive "curing" of anxiety and suffering is delineated in terms of (4) an eightfold path (*magga*) of practice, containing the broad elements of moral, meditative and cognitive refinement.[4]

Among other things, the Buddha's hagiography and teachings indicate that wisdom, philosophical clarity, and such intellectual attainments with which he is credited, are informed fundamentally by a disciplined, systematic praxis. No advancement along the Buddhist "path" is considered possible without it. Although revered as the unsurpassed teacher, the Buddha's authority is derived from – is authorised by – this awakening; his teaching aims to nourish the understanding and fervent practice believed necessary for others to achieve it their own right. Accordingly, the position given to "faith" in Buddhism is of an ultimately provisional nature unlike, for instance, the preeminence it can be granted in Western religions. When practised alongside of morality and wise reflection, the essential place of meditation in Buddhist praxis stems from its purifying and transformative character. Such a character accounts for its ability to reveal reality as-it-is and, in so doing, to confirm experientially the truths which the Buddha realised. In a manner of speaking, regardless of the tradition one wishes to speak of, "Buddhism" is contingent upon two events: the event of the Buddha's lengthy *teaching* career and the event of his awakened *experience* of reality, upon which this teaching is founded.

Which elements of this condensed reading are essential to expand upon in order to enrich our understanding of the nature and experience of meditation and its bearing upon wonder/insight? Most of the remaining explorations in this chapter constitute my reply. Although there is no definitive answer which does not encompass the entire range of Buddhist perspectives, it is important to focus on those features of Buddhist thought which seem most directly to inform the practice lying at the heart of our inquiries. Therefore the discussion deals with Buddhist thought as it provides grounds for a

meditative practice understood to promote insights into most the essential nature of experience – i.e., as unsatisfactory, impermanent, and "self"-less. Before beginning this I will need to gather together some of the findings of these inquiries, which have been uncovered in preceding chapters. This will enable me to formulate the distinctive hermeneutic that I will employ to scrutinise this thought.

Multiple voices are implicit in the reading which ensues. Contesting, indistinct, consonant – together, they comprise the unique *vocation*, calling, which is being generated within this study. So far I have been principally concerned with wonder, insight, meditation, and numerous recent or ancient Western thinkers whose contributions deserve our reflection. But now it is important to acknowledge more fully the inflections which are audible from within Buddhist theory and practice. The most recent chapter has enabled, practically speaking, an understanding of the experience and significance of wonder to emerge. I have suggested that mindfulness meditation can be regarded as a method to educe wonder. For it is intrinsic to the alternately stilling and unsettling character of mindfulness to cultivate that very clearing, or opening, in which the advent of what is present can so wonderfully become apparent. The insight that can develop in this space may be regarded as wonder at its most revealing. Rather as has been accomplished in Chapters Four and Five, where a phenomenological and a more hermeneutic treatment of wonder were developed, respectively, in the present instance I wish to examine some of the theoretical footings for the practice treated in Chapter Six. This obliges me to advance a Buddhist reading of the phenomenological subjects with which I am occupied. Doing so will both establish with more clarity the grounds which underlie and nurture this practice and, ultimately, better (dis)pose this inquiry to venture into the investigation and analysis of the pedagogy (or, what I shall term the "anagogy") of meditation to which the final chapter is devoted.

The perspectives found in Buddhism issue for the most part from somewhat different questions and assurances than do those of Western philosophic traditions. For instance, while the careful analysis of rational assertions is undertaken and valued, the way to wisdom is seen to lie more significantly in reflection which is informed by ongoing meditative practice. Of course, practice of various sorts is hardly absent in the Western tradition, but the characteristics of *that* which it might be thought to promote – knowledge or goodness, let us say – are continually contested by virtue of the methodical doubting which this practice entails. But then, Buddhism is a *religious* philosophy having a defined soteriology. Although diverse philosophical approaches are taken up to ex-

plain the intricacies of cognition, consciousness, karma, the relation between "relative" and "absolute" truth, and so on, it is the goal of liberation from the ongoing cycle of suffering towards which all such endeavours converge. As a consequence of this goal we find that the tradition's extensive theoretic elaborations are not simply complemented but regarded as ultimately revealed and confirmed by a consistent practical focus: the ethical, intellectual and meditative training which leads to wisdom, compassion and peace.

It is not my intention, in what follows, to undertake an extensive presentation and critique of these modes of training, nor of the historical or philosophical context and assumptions which have informed them. Any number of studies offer this. At the same time, my focus upon Buddhist meditation in this study does call for some manner of reflection upon the perspectives which have given rise to this meditative training; in addition, there seems little reason to rule out the possibility of these perspectives having something to contribute to our understandings of the nature and value of wonder (or of teaching). Moreover, along with Heidegger and Lyotard, Plato, Arendt and Calvino, my reflections (and practice) have all along been enlivened by a plethora of Buddhist voices – ancient and modern – to which my contingent experiences of these times have urged me attend. Accordingly, my method of proceeding is to inquire after, engage with, and otherwise interrogate the Buddhist perspective on the basis of two hermeneutics which are informed by the preceding explorations and which therefore already carry with them the questions and interests of this study.

The inquiries of the last two chapters have revealed a pair of orientations. Although only briefly discussed, the hermeneutic of location, has drawn me to consider an apparent valuing of depth, profundity, in preference to the surfaces of the things and beings to which our senses are fundamentally attuned. The second has been far more frequently addressed. It is the hermeneutic of movement, where it is seen that the desire for knowledge can be experienced as the unrelenting urge to surpass the wonder which is associated with ignorance. More recently we have witnessed its presence in meditative practices which generally remain attentive to the ongoing motions of breath and life, as well as within the unsettling quality observed to inhere in wonder and insight. Then again, perhaps each of these interpretive orientations has been implicit from the earliest references to wonder's alternately arresting and disturbing agency, and even to the modes of rest which are needful amidst our (post)modern haste.

I mean to amplify these with Buddhist readings, now, with reference to a hermeneutic of presence and a hermeneutic of change. The first will necessitate a brief investigation of the technical background of meditative practice in Buddhism, the second, an inquiry into that which this practice is understood to make apparent.

A Hermeneutic of Presence

One of the most happy coincidences of our language is the eventful convergence of time and space (as a bonus: giftedness) that is expressed by the word "present." The hermeneutic of location may more tellingly be understood in this context in terms of a hermeneutic of presence. The descriptions of the retreat environment, mindfulness meditation, and the modes of experience it engenders has led me repeatedly to explore the space, clearing or opening of attention promoted therein. Through these means the meditator is engaged in a deliberate process of deepening, quietening and enlarging his or her capacity for *being present* to moment-by-moment experience. (Not that this is *easy*.) The meditative attention can become accommodating, gracious, free of assumption and judgement, and can be described as light and clear. All of these characteristics promote the open space of attentiveness within which experience becomes a more lucid presence – is more pronounced – in its bearing to the meditator.

Meditation: Sources and Methods

Traditions of meditation practice in the Theravāda rest on several interrelated sources: the analytic delineations of experience and cognition presented in the Abhidhamma literature and distilled in the relatively late "Compendium of Abhidhamma" (*Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha*); practical manuals such as the early "Path of Discrimination" (*Paṭisambhidāmagga*), and Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimagga*, or "Path of Purification," dated to the early fifth century C.E. This last work continues to be a work of considerable authority in Theravāda Buddhism, to which frequent reference is found in contemporary meditation manuals and the discourse of learned Buddhists alike. These sources are based upon the detailed directions on meditation offered by the Buddha himself in addition to certain prominent disciples, as are found in the collections of Sutta and Vinaya literature.[5] Although not consistent in all details, together, the canonic and extra-canonic texts outline two interrelated streams of meditation practice: the "cultivation of calm" (*samatha-bhāvanā*) and the "cultivation of insight" (*vipassanā-bhāvanā*).[6] (In the refreshingly concise terminology of the Chinese tradition, the polysyllabic Indian terms for these two broad paths of meditative development are simply called "stopping," *chih*, and "seeing," *kuan*.)

Of the two, the cultivation of calm is regarded by Buddhists to be a system of meditative training that is not distinctly "Buddhist,"[7] but important for setting the stage for mindfulness practice; it employs the concentration (*samādhī*), or one pointedness, of mind to develop psycho-physical calm. Using the common metaphor of the pool of water: to see well, the water through which one gazes must be calm and unclouded. Buddhists observe that the concentrated attention naturally becomes still, and that in this stillness what are known as the "defilements" (*kilesa*) or "hindrances" (*nīvaraṇa*) such as ill-will and sensuous desire temporarily settle, permitting a clear mind. In the last century or so, beginning in Burma, insight practice focussed on the method described in the "Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness," or *Satipaṭṭhāna-sutta*[8] has become the dominant form of meditation taught in Theravādin countries. In earlier times monks would become adept in cultivating calm and then shift their practice to the cultivation of insight (for instance, this is the order of practice delineated in the *Visuddhimagga*); but this fairly recent reorientation noted has meant that meditators tend now to be instructed in mindfulness practice from the start, where sufficient calm is said to be cultivated for the clear seeing needed for insight. To some extent, dedicated practice of techniques producing calm has fallen out of currency.[9] To explain: while it will be shown that various aspects of psycho-physical experience may be selected as objects for the application of mindfulness, this practice differs from concentration meditation in the critical sense that the practitioner does not seek to narrow the focus of consciousness to the same extent. Rather, a less advanced degree of concentration is employed in a moment by moment fashion to focus the practitioner's attention upon the precise (but changing) qualities of experience. In any case, in my frequent reference to the stilling of experience, to those times, for instance, when silence is not so much performed as embodied, and to the clearing or opening which occur in meditation – in all of these states an important dimension of what is here referred to as concentration and calm is entailed.

In addition to the *Satipaṭṭhana-sutta*, mentioned above, the canonic sources for mindfulness meditation are the "Longer Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness" (*Mahā-satipaṭṭhana-sutta*),[10] and the "Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing" (*Ānāpānasati-sutta*).[11] As has previously been shown, mindfulness, or *sati*, is as Sobin describes it, "the mental activity used to inspect an object of consciousness with bare attention, on a *momentary basis*."[12] It is in these texts that the Buddha delineates the four "foundations of mindfulness": body, sensation, emotion or mood, and thinking. These foundations are ranges of experience on which mindfulness can be established. Each of them pertains to one's own experience in the present; they do not involve abstract thinking or deliberate

forays into memory or imagination. Moreover, each has been implicit in the preceding examination of retreat experience. In Buddhist texts these "foundations" are discussed in a systematic fashion, which I will now summarise.

Four Foundations of Mindfulness

(1) "Observing the body" (*kāyānupassanā*) refers to placing one's full attention on, for example, the sitting, standing, walking or lying positions. This is distinct from forgetting or being unclear about what one is doing. One's awareness of these states tends to be clearest in the presence of discomfort or when one has just changed from one position into another. If the meditator has been sitting for some time and then stands, his or her body is experienced differently – pressure on the feet, the issue of balance, the blood pressure, and so on. In whichever position, attention is placed on the characteristic of this experience simply for what it is. In the laconic words of the *Satipaṭṭhana-sutta*:

> when walking, a bhikkhu [monk] understands: "I am walking;" when standing, he understands: "I am standing;" when sitting, he understands: "I am sitting;" when lying down, he understands: "I am lying down;" or he understands accordingly however his body is disposed.[13]

There are various means described for establishing mindfulness of the body. Along with observing these positions, all movements and actions are understood to be incorporated into mindfulness of the body, such as eating, going to sleep or drinking. In addition, mindfulness of breathing, also categorised under "body," is probably the most common single method and employed as a focus for attention in sitting and lying postures.

(2) "Observing the sensations" (*vedanānupassanā*) is the alert awareness of bodily feelings as pleasant, painful or neutral in tone. The fact that an itchy nose or pain in the shoulders, are common while meditating in the sitting posture (i.e., the first "foundation") indicates that these two foundations – indeed, all four – are cultivated with one another. Here, meditators will often note that clarity regarding a pleasant sensation is inhibited by an active "liking," regarding an unpleasant one by their active disliking, and regarding a neutral one by their inattention to it. If, for instance, we simply scratch when we itch, reflexively, we have "missed" a moment for mindfulness to be present. We have not noticed the itch as the itch, but as something needing a good scratch. Similarly, the experience of pain will often elicit either anger or anxiety, but with the presence of strong mindfulness the pain as (merely) pain can be experienced.

(3) The Pali term *citta* is often translated "mind" or "states of mind" but it is more accurate to understand the next foundation as the "observing of emotion" or "mood" (*cit-*

tānupassanā). Here, one's sense of anxiety, sadness, joy, boredom, anger, distraction, etc., are the subjects of attention. As with the sensations, the challenge in practice focussed on mood is to be *aware* of boredom or anger rather than to be "caught up in" them in a habitual manner. Asked how an afternoon's sitting has been going the first response of a meditator for whom boredom has been predominant might respond with, "Oh, I don't know. Kind of *blah*, I guess." The lack of interest which defines such boredom can (by definition) make one's mindful interest in it seem very improbable. In itself, mindfulness does not seek to change such a mood into a more alert one, but the sustained awareness of boredom as boredom will infuse this experience with interest, revealing it to be less, or more, than it had been assumed to be. Similarly, anger which is no longer "fueled" by our engagement in it, but simply observed, will tend to soften from the compact or jagged thing it was.

(4) "Observing of mind-objects," or simply "thoughts" (*dhammānupassanā*) offers the final foundation upon which mindfulness can be established according to this tradition. This includes the presence or absence of thoughts of desire or anger, doubt or mental restlessness. The treatment found in one of the discourses mentioned, the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhana-sutta*, also includes in its presentation of this foundation the reflection upon various categories of Buddhist doctrine, such as the five "aggregates" (*khandhā*),[14] the four "noble truths" (*ariya-sacca*) and the seven "factors of enlightenment" (*bojjhanga*).[15] In doing so it appears to extend beyond what has been referred to as "bare awareness" of what is happening in experience to a rational reflection upon doctrine – or, to be more in line with what is connoted by "contemplation" (a word often used to translate the Pali, *anupassanā*). However, instead of simply "thinking" about such doctrines, this practice would first require a meditator's thorough familiarity with them and then entail a systematic exercise in which each component would be considered in view of present experience. Otherwise, the movement of thoughts is simply observed. Here again, the challenge is to be *aware of* the quality of thinking or the arising and ceasing of thoughts rather than to be, as we say, "absorbed in thought."

As a corollary to this presentation it is worth noting that for insight practice several methods for balancing mindfulness and concentration are employed. For instance, five "spiritual faculties" (*indriya*) are identified which enable the meditator to cultivate clear, harmonious experience conducive to the arising of insight. They are: faith or confidence (*saddhā*), energy (*viriya*), mindfulness, concentration and wisdom (*paññā*). Ideally, they are understood to operate in a complementary, harmonising fashion. Confidence and

wisdom, when balanced, preclude one's experience from being directed tangentially either through emotion or intellect; likewise, the balance of energy and concentration ensures that experience is free of both restlessness and lethargy. The commentator Buddhaghosa also notes that balancing of concentration and faith, and of concentration and wisdom is required. Mindfulness, the third of these "faculties," functions at the centre of these pairs by overseeing the process:

> Strong mindfulness, however, is needed in all instances; for mindfulness protects the mind from lapsing into agitation through faith, energy and wisdom, which favour agitation, and from lapsing into idleness through concentration, which favours idleness. So it is as desirable in all instances as a seasoning of salt in all sauces, as a prime minister in all the king's business.[16]

The group of these five faculties is but one of the many practical systems delineated by the tradition to cultivate skilful practice, and can be seen to fit into the present context of "observing the thoughts."

Other than the more doctrinally specific aspects of this last foundation for establishing mindfulness we can note that each of the four that has been mentioned can be found in the descriptions of and interviews from retreat practice recently discussed. Moreover, each of them is accompanied by a curious formula: for instance, in being mindful of the body's positions or movements the meditator "abides observing body as body" (*kāye kāyānupassī viharati*);[17] the same applies to sensations, moods, and thoughts. The end of this phrase can also be translated, "body in body," although on the face of it this may not alleviate its seeming redundancy.

Experience as Experience

Body as body... what might this mean? In the meditative sphere, the issue is not to develop an increasingly clear "idea" about the body; rather, a different training is at work. In this case, "body" ("sensations," "mood," "thoughts") is not imagined, remembered or conceived: it is *experienced*, when this is understood as "the encounter with something that asserts its own truth."[18] An extreme counter-example can be cited with reference to a sufferer of *anorexia nervosa*, where the person's image of being "fat" may prevail over even his or her emaciated reflection in the mirror. Yet anyone need only experience the sudden dissolution of some hitherto incorrigible opinion ("What was I thinking? I must have been *blind*.") to appreciate how dense the mediation of conceptions can be. This is most apparent where emotions or attitudes seem to be reified by our identification with them. In such cases *this* person, *this* thing is, as it were, over laden or utterly imbued

with the tenor of our presuppositions. Opinion in this sense can be characterised by an opacity. However, we have seen that "bare attention" connotes an awareness which is free from determination, preference, judgement, etc. In the same way "body as body" entails the absence of preconception in one's present experience.

Accordingly, the hermeneutic of presence is conspicuous in this dimension of meditative technique. It ceases, in these moments, to be an object and becomes in the most alert sense the *subject* of one's full attention. As a consequence the emphatic presence of experience to mindfulness can be evident in each of the four modalities of attention known as the "foundations of mindfulness."

But what becomes of the open space which so often figures in our discussion of the meditative sphere? The lack of intervening conception suggests an *im*-mediacy in which space is eliminated; on the other hand bare attention suggests a disengagement in which what opens is an objective *distance*. This seeming paradox is addressed with reference to the *interest* which inheres in mindfulness. Mindful attention promotes the commodious space in which one's interest, being-in-the-midst, is possible. In a sense, that which *is* is gifted, presented. As an example, the experience of fear is by definition aversive, something one seeks to avoid or flee from. Yet when the object of fear is experienced *as it is*, in this sense (i.e., "fear as fear"), it achieves a legitimate presence in the open space of experience which enables one to be present to its subjective character. It might be said that an openness is gained in which the event of being present-with can occur.

In the foregoing I have made reference to "experience as it is." Similarly, Buddhist literature speaks of meditators attaining "vision and knowledge of reality as-it-is" (*yathā-bhūta-ñāṇadassana*). It is important to inquire into what is being referred to, here, since such expressions may lead us to conceive of the Buddhist claim to be of an utterly objective, transparent view of reality in which the subjectivity of the meditator is absent.

Contrastive reference to Gadamer's views of experience and "historically effected consciousness" (*wirkungsgeschichtliche Bewußtsein*) can assist us to gain greater clarity about the Buddhist perspective. When speaking of meditation I have made reference to an increasing openness emerging in regards to moment-by-moment experience, as the texture of opinion becomes less pronounced and meditative attention more lucid. For his part, Gadamer understands experience to be characterised by an openness to what is which possesses its own agency.[19] He calls someone "experienced" who has become "aware of his experience,"[20] and by way of elaboration observes that,

> If it is characteristic of every phase of the process of experience that the experienced person acquires a new openness to new experiences, this is certainly true of the idea of being perfectly experienced. It does not mean that experience has ceased and a higher form of knowledge is reached (Hegel), but that for the first time experience fully and truly is. In it all dogmatism, which proceeds from the soaring desires of the human heart, reaches an absolute barrier. Experience teaches us to acknowledge the real.[21]

What is this "real" for Gadamer? To an important degree, *Truth and Method* is concerned to show how all acts of understanding are constituted by "prejudice," which is for Gadamer to say, by our cultural, historical groundedness – the "experience of one's own historicity."[22] In this context he calls "insight" a revelatory self knowledge which is characterised by an "escape" from the fiction of our being ungrounded. In such insight, that is, we realise our finitude, meaning that "the truly experienced person is one who has taken this to heart."[23] An interesting convergence can be observed, here, regarding the culminating insight of Buddhism into our fundamentally conditioned existence, and the liberation this insight brings with it. However, Gadamer's motivations are not soteriological to this degree, and he is consistent in his affirmation that understanding is always mediated by our "historically effected consciousness" and can never be *final*. That this is so, is clearly stated at the conclusion of his study:

> In understanding we are drawn into an event and arrive, as it were, too late, if we want to know what we are supposed to believe.
>
> Thus, there is undoubtedly no understanding that is free of all prejudices, however much the will of our knowledge must be directed towards escaping their thrall.[24]

How does Buddhism view this matter? Is the experience of "reality as-it-is" unsurpassable by consequent refinements of attention, or to express this otherwise: is "awakening" (*bodhi*) final? In one sense, yes. Like any religious enterprise Buddhism offers a certain assessment of the human condition and potential, and a confident prescription regarding the means to attain this potential.[25] That this assessment and prescription are not divinely revealed but handed down from a person, to be verified and modulated within other people's experiences, does not qualify appreciably the authority and definitive status of awakening in the tradition. However, there is no need to claim that one who has experienced awakening somehow stands outside of his or her society or historical milieu. Issues apart from this are at work: rather than objective distance it is the presence of subjectivity that is apparent. Buddhist meditation is understood to lead the practitioner towards the luminous experience of experience: what comprises pleasure or pain? what provokes thought, emotion? what constitutes my self? That is, Buddhism will

claim that such meditative practice can refine one's understanding of what it regards to be the essentials informing any of our hermeneutic orientations, namely, the persistence of desire, delusion, anger, and their causal relations to all forms of suffering. In a sense, *all* other questions – the business of sports or cancer research, the importance of Virginia Woolf's novels, the genesis of Greek diphthongs, the global decline of peasant life, the idea of beauty – are subsumed under these. What is more, the hermeneutic of presence is thoroughgoing within the Buddhist perspective. It is both practised in the meditative attention which methodically opens by accepting or consenting to the texture(s) of experience described in the four foundations of mindfulness, and becomes accomplished as a mode of attentiveness which is insightfully present to what is. In this way, far from bringing final closure to the openness of experience, the very nature of this culminating, "awakened" insight is that it permits one's sustained *inter-est* in experience as experience.

If we encounter, in the hermeneutic of presence, further suggestion of what is profound, it is achieved only with ongoing reference to the immediate face of experience which opens up these depths. One's exposure before the profundity of what is does not come at the expense of its effacement. It is for this reason that mindfulness meditation, *sati*, has since antiquity been known as *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, the cultivation of insight. It is to the explication of the characteristics of this insight that the next section is devoted.

Meditation as a 'Technology'

Before turning to this, however, I wish to consider another issue which bears upon meditative technique. Among the final interests undertaken by Michel Foucault was his inquiry into what he called "technologies of the self." Two features of this discussion warrant our attention: the general question of what issues come into play when individuals deliberately act upon themselves, and the specific question of what understandings of the self emerge from our own inquiries into the meditative culture of Buddhism. By way of definition, Foucault says that technologies of the self

> permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.[26]

In this article he examines the enterprise of "taking care of yourself" in the ancient Greek and Roman worlds, and in Christian asceticism. His analysis indicates that the famous Delphic injunction "know yourself" was always understood along with, "take care of

yourself." Platonists placed emphasis on the former while later groups such as the Stoics emphasised the latter,[27] but in each case their important relation was maintained. The obscuring, over time, of caring for oneself in favour of knowing oneself was for Foucault a product of the ascetic undercurrent to Christian-influenced morality:

> In Christianity asceticism always refers to a certain renunciation of the self and of reality because most of the time your self is a part of that reality you have to renounce in order to get access to another level of reality.[28]

Reference to these "technologies" invites inquiry into the way in which the self is understood in view of meditative technique and the traditional rhetoric of Buddhist culture. Both the care and knowledge of the self in Foucault's sense are present in meditation practice, in addition to a problematic of the self. In the presentation raised in the preceding chapter, for instance, we have encountered a silencing of the social self, a scrutinising of the habitual self, a calming of the restless self, an unburdening of the familial or occupational self, an easing of the distressed self, a clarification of the confused self, and so on. What is more, a comparison between the Buddhist perspective and the Christian morality related above can be made, in the sense that in Buddhism, too, there a "technology" for dealing with problematic aspects of "self." Issuing from the struggles, interests and preoccupations of renunciate culture, a decided rhetorical leaning can be discerned in Buddhist literature, which is often seen to reiterate and extend these problematics. Here, we enter into the use in Buddhist literature of similes and metaphors. Many examples could be offered, such as the undomesticated horse or ox (the unruly self is disciplined); the defilements or stains (the unclean self is purified); the middle path (the extreme self is moderated); clarity and insight (the blind self becomes sighted); and the many agrarian or botanical metaphors (the potential or immature self becomes fruitful).

Reference to such problematics helps to remind us of the assumptions which have informed the Buddhist tradition since its inception. Nevertheless, further discussion of the nature of self, below, will reveal that other issues are also at work.

A Hermeneutic of Change

It might be remarked in general that there seem to be no compelling reasons to prevent our believing that people everywhere have experienced and made some reference to the gradations or nuances of wonder. Mention of it in religious literature is commonplace, something which is borne out in Indian traditions. Sanskrit literature uses the term *vismayaḥ* to denote wonder, astonishment, and so on. *Vismayaḥ* is derived from the verb

vismi, "to wonder or be surprised at."[29] A Tantric practice known as *vismaya-mūdra*, or the "gesture of astonishment," is a deliberate show of surprise – open mouth, wide eyes – that is cultivated to foster an active sensitivity to the intrinsic wonder of all the experiences one encounters during life.[30] This may be related to the ability of *vismayaḥ* to produce what is called the *adbhuta rasa*, or "marvellous sentiment"[31] referred to in Indian aesthetic theory. Early Pali and Sanskrit Buddhist texts refer to *acchariya*[32] or *āścaryam*,[33] respectively, as a marvellous occurrence. For instance, Ānanda, the Buddha's attendant, expresses such wonderment at the spiritual attainment of the monks gathered around the aged Buddha during his last hours.[34] Similarly, in a typically systematic manner, one text describes four "wonderful, marvellous things" which become apparent when a Buddha shares his teaching: that people who normally find delight in their attachments learn the value of non-attachment, that people's habitual pride is softened when learning of the virtue of its relinquishment, that the apparent pleasures of restlessness give way to ease, and that ignorance becomes weakened and abolished by wisdom.[35] The Sanskrit noun *adbutatam* refers to wonder in its character as a "miracle"; many of these are described in the canonic literature.[36] One is the story of the Buddha multiplying himself in order to be able to accept each of the parasols being offered him by the gods of the thirty-three heavens (an event Borges charmingly deems "a miracle of courtesy"[37]). This same denotation of "a wonder" as a singular event beyond our ordinary experience of things is referred to in a later Buddhist Sanskrit text, when the philosopher Candrakīrti remarks: "What is amazing is when some exceptional, inconceivable thing is perceived, but not something which is uniform everywhere: the fact that fire is hot is nothing amazing at all!"[38] Being familiar, fire's very nature as it is is clearly not a wonder of this type for Candrakīrti.

Although such instances might reveal still further dimensions to our appreciation of wonder I am more concerned in what follows to inquire into the nature of that insight which Buddhism understands to be gained during the exposure before the presence of what is revealed in mindfulness meditation. The term *vipassanā* (*vi*: separation, expansion, intensification + *passati*: to see, realise, know, find[39]), or "insight," is intrinsically bound to *paññā*, usually translated as "wisdom." Buddhaghosa defines *paññā* as having "the characteristic of penetrating the individual essences of states."[40] Buddhist texts claim that experience comes to be seen as thoroughly conditioned, to take rise and to fall away. In the clearing promoted by mindfulness the nature and questionability of experience becomes evident. Specifically, as a consequence of the dedicated application of mindfulness, insight arises in regards to what are known as the "three characteristics of

existence": that all existence is impermanent in nature (*anicca*), that moments of experience are marked by unsatisfactoriness (*dukkha*), and that, being fundamentally conditioned, we and all things lack inherent substantiality or self-ness (i.e., *anattā* or "no-self"). These interwoven insights are understood to have profound soteriological consequences for the individual, but my chief interest is to inquire more fully into what they reveal of experience and life. Before considering these characteristics, reference must be made to the dynamic grounds which explicitly inform all Buddhist thought – its understanding of causality as a dynamic process occasioned by mutually conditioned phenomena.

Causality and Its Characteristics

Buddhist teaching such as the "four noble truths," mentioned in the early pages of this chapter, tend to be expressed in various ways according to the circumstances under which they have been given (remembered, edited, etc.). In the case of this foundational *dharma* it can appear in more abbreviated fashion. (The crucial term *dhamma*, or, in its more commonly used Sanskrit form, *dharma*, is generally translated in the Buddhist context as "teaching," or "truth," but it is important to note that it is derived from the verb *dhṛ*: to be or exist; to support or bear; to practise or preserve.[41]) For instance, many texts simply refer to the truths of "suffering, arising, cessation, and path." An even more concise expression focusses on the causal basis of these four truths: "Whatever things have an origin must come to cessation."[42] With reference to the four noble truths, that is, since it is caused by craving suffering can be definitively stopped. The teaching to which this makes implicit reference, i.e. "dependent origination" or "conditioned co-arising" (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), may be thought of as the "grammar" that informs all other categories of Buddhist thought – the heart of Buddhist doctrine.[43] Along with the doctrine of the four noble truths, this understanding of causality is declared in early Buddhist literature to be a teaching unique to the Buddha.

The most well-known formulation of conditioned co-arising delineates twelve "limbs" (*aṅga*) of psycho-physical experience as the causal factors which contribute to the cycle of *saṃsāra*. Since an exploration of these limbs would take us beyond what is needed in the present context I will focus on a common and more succinct expression of the theory: "When this exists, that comes to be; with the arising of this, that arises. When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases."[44] To paraphrase the four noble truths, that is, one's suffering depends upon the existence of craving; without craving suffering ceases.

Generally speaking, it is our existential situation – the fact that we suffer and the possibility of the cessation of suffering – that this causal theory addresses. Yet, as mentioned, it thoroughly animates all Buddhist thought. The significance of conditioned co-arising upon ethics is evident in view of the fact that all actions (*karma*) of body, speech and mind are understood to be causally efficient, as the conditions for subsequent experience for oneself and others. Its bearing upon ethics is considerably extended when it is recalled that the scope of experience extends cyclically – in principle, infinitely beyond the horizon of a single lifetime. Buddhism also understands perceptual and epistemological questions in this light, enumerating the causal conditions which give rise to cognition, and so on. Moreover, all phenomena are dependent for their existence on the presence of supporting conditions, which are simultaneously dependent on other such conditions. This leads to the view (considerably elaborated in later Buddhist thought) that all conditioned phenomena share a fundamental insubstantiality or "emptiness" (*suññatā*; Sanskrit, *śūnyatā*). That is, no "thing" exists independently of this causal matrix, in whose midst the mutable coalescence of all "beings" is supported by and interrelated with all others. As Borges poetically observes,

> to say *the tiger* is to say the tigers that begot it, the deer and turtles devoured by it, the grass on which the deer fed, the earth that was mother to the grass, the heaven that gave birth to the earth.[45]

Clearly, the consequences of *paṭicca-samuppāda*, conditioned co-arising, are far-reaching in Buddhist thought and life. It pertains not only to the myriad experiences of human life, but to weather systems and plate tectonics, goose eggs, timely puns and the free-market economy. But, remembering that our principal concern is to elucidate that about which insight arises, we can turn to those three "characteristics of existence" (*lakkhaṇa-bhava*) that are said to be informed by this causal grammar.

Change as Radical Movement

While this may not seem a difficult thing to discern as we cast our attention about us, in the Buddhist view no amount of reading, hearing or thinking will accomplish a fundamental insight into impermanence (nor into the other characteristics). As useful as intellectual preparedness might be, this insight entails a direct experience and knowing. In part, this is because thinking, too, is conditioned: ultimately tautological. The Buddhist path cannot be "thought through" to the end. It is for this reason that the Buddha is reported on many occasions to have declared the understanding which comes of insight to be, "profound, hard to see, hard to grasp, peaceful, excellent, beyond reasoning."[46]

The insight into impermanence (*anicca*) is understood to be a profound realisation of the instability of things. But it might be asked why "insight" is required to tell us about something so obvious. After all, things are always moving; we notice the impermanence of people around us, who grow older, change interests, and so on. The seasons and the course of the heavenly bodies surely proclaim the impermanence of the natural world to our senses. Why would meditation be necessary to convince us of *this*? What more do we need to know? The consequences of gaining an insight into impermanence are ramified: it is realised that no place, thing or being can offer a secure mooring; that no object or person can provide permanent satisfaction; and that unchanging ease is to be found in no emotion or conception, however certain or firmly held. Conversely, knowing, seeing, and being wholly attuned to reality as-it-is (*yathābhūta*) is the content of the wisdom which is fully awake, and is understood to be consonant with ease-in-living.

Previous examinations have led me to reflect upon a hermeneutic of movement. We have observed it in the haste implicit in the (post)modern turn away from what is "given," and in the twofold movement towards knowledge and away from ignorance present in much philosophical discourse. Elsewhere, by means of the subtle opening which occurs in mindfulness practice the meditator becomes intimately acquainted with the movement of thoughts, emotions and sensations. As we have just seen, however, another more radical dimension of movement can be observed at the heart of meditative attention which is the subject of all of Buddhist thought in one way or another. Conventionally speaking, to move is to change positions and to notice movement is to be aware of things moving. As subjects we move from one place to another ourselves, until we come once again to rest. A conventional view of movement, that is, may neglect the very question of the ontological status of these objects and subjects which Buddhist understandings of causality expose.

A hermeneutic of change obliges us to consider the nature and extent of the movement we observe in a more dynamic manner and it is to the vital causal agency of the life in which we participate that the meditative process is said to expose us. As will soon be discussed, the very conception of "identity" is implicated by this focus upon change, such that our existence is understood – and, in insight: seen, experienced – to be a causal flux in which we both participate and are passionate recipients. What is more, like all other passions *change is something we suffer*.

Change as a Passion

While any number of conditions could be enumerated, early Buddhist texts generally speak of suffering (*dukkha*) in terms of birth, old age, sickness and death. To these existential registers are sometimes added: separation from ones dear to us, association with those one dislikes, the inability to obtain what one wants, and clinging to what are called the five "aggregates" (*khandhā*) which comprise us (for instance, clinging to our bodies, to the sensations we experience or ideas we develop). Of the countless forms it can take, Buddhism identifies gradations from the coarse – physical injury, disease, and so on – to more subtle forms that could include anxiety, sadness or a sense of failure. Suffering is clearly related to impermanence, to the change which brings the erosion of hopes or expectations, the loss of loved ones and, eventually, the change which brings death. We suffer such change because it is beyond our control and happens to us in spite of our best efforts to avoid or forestall it. As David Loy observes, all Buddhist theories may be considered heuristic, since they are all concerned with the issue of resolving suffering.[7]

Beginning with its explication in the four noble truths, that is, suffering assumes a large position in the Buddhist assessment of the human condition, and we might ask whether it is good or "healthy," even, to focus upon this inevitability. And here again it might be asked what one can expect to be exposed to, beyond the "facts of life," which seem so apparent. Old people become decrepit and die, people meet with tremendous misfortune daily in the news and each of us will at some time experience illness, injury and multiple forms of loss. What more than this can an *insight* tell us?

But it could be asked, on the other handl, to what degree suffering really *is* "seen." After all, popular Western culture often seems in headlong flight from any acknowledgement of the facts of old age, sickness and death. Where cosmetics or euphemism are insufficient, the elderly and dying are often simply ignored or shunned. A culture of youth, savvy, vigour and abundance insinuates itself by all possible means into our awareness. Mass media brings acutely to our attemtion what we "need" in order to be whole and conform to these stereotypes.

And of course, far more acute difficulties are presented by truly immediate forms of suffering. Here, I am addressing the question of the degree to which we do indeed "acknowledge" or confront the experience of distress. Very often, where ignoring suffering does not suffice it tends to be railed against or feared; forms of depression are common in people undergoing long-term pain, for whom it can simply be "too much." These natural responses to suffering stem, in the Buddhist view, from an inability to be present

to precisely what is occurring. Without wishing to minimise the difficulty in doing so, whenever we want something to be *different* we are not being faithfully attentive to what is.

From the Buddhist perspective the inevitability of suffering is causally related to our craving or desire (*taṇhā*: which includes our desire for things to be otherwise, or, our aversion for what is). This, in congress with our ignorance of the conditions which make suffering inevitable, comprises our agency in its perpetuation. Before considering this further, it must be noted that desire is as multifarious a form in Buddhism as it is elsewhere. For instance, one might ask what is to become of the aspirations one nurtures, and whether desire is not present in a person's noble accomplishments as well as in the expressions of human greed, or "crimes of passion." From the Buddhist perspective there is also the question of enlightenment and, before this, of what it is that urges one to practice the Buddhist "path" in the first place. Reflecting on this problem, Michael McGhee suggests that the generative agency of the practice is such that the sublimation of desire is an inevitable consequence of one's engagement in it:

> Desire is awakened in the inquirer for what may, for all *they* know, be an illusion. It is also a desire for something which cannot be *had* or possessed: one becomes it, if indeed there is anything to become, and so it seems that a condition of so becoming is a releasing of ourselves from grasping.[48]

Buddhism's identification of craving as causally responsible for the ongoing nature of suffering may seem (perhaps like its focus upon suffering in general) to be both apparent and over-stated. But the tradition contends that, lacking an awakened sense of the whole I am forever wanting, needful, and so crave things to fulfill and satisfy me. These "things" are likewise conditioned, changing and, since their real nature is never wholly confronted, my frustrations tend to grow rather than diminish. Even our wants can be fickle, such that possessing what one desires is often accompanied by the shadow of suffering, as the change that suffuses the object and ourselves continues unabated – a prized object has lost its lustre; our taste changes; the fashion has passed it by, for instance. Thus, from this view the presence of ignorance and desire constitutes a *resistance* to the conditioned co-arising which informs life; and our suffering is a consequence of resisting, and thereby compounding, the legitimate pain which issues from our living. As Shinzen Young remarks, pain plus resistance equals suffering.[49]

In addition, our conscious or unconscious stance – the perspective we have constructed and/or absorbed from our being in the world – is susceptible to a crisis of meaning and

identity when the grounds on which sense has been "made" suffer degradation or collapse. Until a definitive insight into the pervasive extent and depth of causality is realised, I am bound to live out the consequences of being unconscious of it. Since I cannot refuse to act, since my actions are imbued with the "flavour" of my intentional standing towards the world-of-others, and since all action (*karma*) is consequential, in this view, I am disposed to live out of this deluded perspective, with the results of these actions experienced to confirm their incipient taste. I experience anxiety, suffering and all manner of *dis*-ease because I take myself to be a real subject in relation to an objectified world. Loy notes that,

> Without confronting the ultimate source of our [Sanskrit:] *duhkha*, any amelioration in one aspect of life will only shift the emphasis to another: from physical pain to psychological stress, for example. This is because, like psychoanalytic anxiety, *duhkha* is not something we have but something we are.[50]

Insight into the inherence of suffering, thus, is in part a profound acquaintance with and acceptance of its inevitability in life. All of which makes the acknowledgement of this characteristic vital, from the Buddhist perspective. In this way, insight both offers a definitive exposure to the fact of suffering and animates one's attitude towards it with a variety of liberating consent. While it is true that we suffer from passions precisely because they happen to us, this understanding of karma and the causality of desire indicates that we are also agents in the passions from which we suffer. As a result, insight into this characteristic would seem to entail a definitive recognition of where one stands in relation to the suffering one endures.

Change as the Condition of Being

It may have seemed out of place, earlier, to consider meditation as a form of technology, since this is so strongly connotative of instrumental control and an incessant mechanisation which often appears at odds with the lifeworld, not to mention the life of the planet. In his essay on "The Question Concerning Technology," Heidegger has given thought to the implications of this word which are helpful, here. Briefly put, in this case one is drawn to consider the fact that "technology" contains within it resources that extend beyond mere instrumentalism, as when a river becomes viewed solely as a source of hydro-electric power.[51] Instead, he shows that the word, which is derived from *techne* ("art," "craft"), is related both to "bringing forth" (*poiesis*) and "knowing" (*episteme*).[52] Seen from this orientation, if there is any virtue in understanding meditation technologically it is in terms of that which is brought forth and comes to be known in the cultiva-

tion of insight, the consideration of which necessarily returns us to the "problematics of self."

There is a sense in which Buddhism offers two modes of understanding the self, which pertain to Heidegger's analysis as well as to the questions Foucault has invited, earlier. As we have seen, a problematics of self is evident in the rhetorical sway of much Buddhist literature. Most of the "technologies" that were formulated, earlier, situated the self negatively, as something to be purified or tamed, for instance. However, these technologies may also be viewed in a broader context of bringing forth and knowing, which opens up the question of precisely what is educed by meditative practice. As we know, Buddhism replies that it is "insight," *vipassanā*, in view of which we come to the last of these three characteristics of existence: that which regards "no-self" (*anattā*).

The possibility that meditation is a technique for establishing mindful attention upon experience as experience and, ultimately, for cultivating insight, eventually leads to an exploration into the nature of the "self" from the Buddhist perspective. It may be observed that within meditative attention the nature of our experience becomes open to question. This is not to say that the consenting interest of bare attention is also an *active* questioning. Rather, in the opening which is revealed by the meditative disciplines the animated dimensions of what one attends to become apparent. In this regard Gadamer's observation about genuine questions is especially germane: "When a question arises, it breaks open the being of the object, as it were."[53] In a similar fashion, the "cultivation of insight" is contingent upon the fact that mindfulness of the textures of sensory experience, the qualities of thought and emotion, and so on, can incite an event in which one becomes exposed to the life, agency and "characteristics" of this experience. That is, as well as being an exposure to impermanence and suffering it is said to be an exposure that can bring into question the dynamic nature of the self.

In Buddhism, the essential *change* which renders all things ineligible to stand as lasting sources of satisfaction also reaches into *us*: we, too, are subject to change. We have seen in relation to the two other "characteristics" that they seem at first to tell us very little. Here again, at first glance the fact that we change may not seem too remarkable a notion, since we are used to the variations over time of our memories, bodies, aspirations, health, preferences, and so forth (I now listen to more jazz than classical music; with my injured knee I can no longer jump down scree slopes). But what the characteristic of "no-self" undermines is a continuous stratum of identity, an enduring self, which is assumed to underlie these vicissitudes (as when I can't help thinking that I am, at the same time,

still the same person who listens to jazz and walks more gingerly in the mountains). In other words, we are not simply subject to change, but *subjects of change*. In an curious sense, change *becomes* us.

In this sense Buddhism is not *negating* the self but bringing into question the category, "self." Rather than the general coherence of our lives being underwritten by a stable soul, or self, Buddhism contends that the apparent continuity of experience is the product of our "making sense" of our perceptions, sensations, memories, and so on, and thereby reifying this experience into a permanent source of identity. In this way we read into the flow of experience a continuity which exceeds it: continuity has become reified into "existence" when, actually, all there *is* is experience. Experience, in this view, is prior to existence.[54] Some crises – the loss of one's job, say – may precipitate an enormous struggle to "find oneself" and, thereby, bring this phenomenon to the attention more conspicuously. Any number of issues are relevant, here. One's way of being in the world may change radically without income; the very question of "who one is" is opened up with the absence of a job designation, lowered self-worth, and altered relations to society; even one's experience of temporality shifts when time is, we might say, no longer money. When regained, or "collected," the self may once more become ensconced in unreflective experience. Others, with a less resilient self, may not really recover from such a crisis and loss. From a Buddhist perspective one has not become "selfless," here, nor is one now experiencing no-self in the sense we are considering it; rather, the underlying misperceptions of assuming the existence of self have continued – only in the second instance it is the more difficult circumstances of living with a "diminished self" that is apparent.

With the notion of no-self, too, desire is identified as a root source which prevents our understanding of reality as-it-is, for just as we desire to *have* we also desire to *be*. Both can be understood as tangents of that fundamental craving which is implicated in the ongoing condition of one's *dis*-ease or suffering. The problematics of self is therefore not ultimately grounded upon a sense that the self (as a real, but defiled or "unspiritual" entity) needs to be ignored, cleansed, narrativised, remolded or destroyed. Instead, it hinges upon the simple fact, from the Buddhist perspective, that misunderstanding this point must continue by varying degrees to lead to distress.

Therefore the two apparent modes of viewing the self are in terms of: (1) that which needs to be cared for through disciplined attention and the refinement of passion and intention – a practice in which desire becomes quieted, thus enabling clear seeing, and

(2) that which ultimately qualifies the first – self understood as a construction of desire, ultimately conditioned and impermanent. The first occupies one's practical attention and eventually reveals the second.

The difficulty of this doctrine/insight has never been lost on practitioners or philosophers, whether Buddhist or non-Buddhist. For instance, B.K. Matilal shows that debates among Indian philosophical traditions were often concerned with the characteristics of the "self" or "no-self"; something of the subtle or paradoxical nature (depending on one's perspective) of the Buddhist position is remarked upon by the eleventh century Hindu thinker, Udayana: "even the Buddhist has to know the true nature of the *self* or soul, so that he can comprehend fully what it is that lacks ultimate existence or ultimate essence."[55] Meanwhile, the important thirteenth century Sōtō Zen teach Dōgen remarks:

> To study the buddha way is to study the self. To study the self is to forget the self. To forget the self is to be actualized by myriad things. When actualized by myriad things, your body and mind as well as the bodies and minds of others drop away. No trace of realization remains, and this no-trace continues endlessly.[56]

Steven Collins has written an important study on the Buddhist notion of no-self which employs a distinction between "cognitive" (i.e., rationally held) and "affective" beliefs. For the Buddhist, he observes, although the doctrine of no-self can be cognitively understood it is not absorbed into the affective sphere except through the transformations wrought by meditative practice.[57] That is, although rational reflection and study are deemed important for gaining an intellectual acquaintance with and openness to this difficult issue, only actual *insight* into no-self will suffice to reveal its true character. As Collins observes, among other things this is because the concept of self is so deeply, naturally, rooted in our way of looking at the world:

> In terms of apparently abstract conceptual analysis... the Buddhist attitude to selfhood, to personality and continuity, is that impersonal mental and material elements are arranged together in a temporarily unified configuration. What unifies and prolongs this configuration is desire; it is in desire for the enjoyment of these constituents of personality, and for their continuance, that there arises for the unenlightened man "the conceit 'I am'" (*asmimāna*), a "conceit" which is not so much asserted propositionally as performed automatically by "the utterance 'I am'" (*ahaṃkāra*). Desire here, indeed, brings about its own object....[58]

With selfhood being assumed prior to this crucial insight, therefore, the economies of desire, including even the assumptions embedded in language, lead to its perpetuation.

This being so, meditative practice can bring one into varying forms of struggle with the constructed self, but it is ultimately understood to nurture the conditions in which insight into this characteristic of existence might be realised. As we have seen from the second perspective, "self" is a category of conventional ("unawakened") experience. Causally speaking, this notion arises interdependently with craving and ignorance; it is constructed, fictive, and both a source and product of suffering. Our reified self-ness and our suffering arise simultaneously. In this sense the process of mindfulness meditation can be termed a "technology of no-self." But no-self, as explained, is not the absence of something formerly present nor the denial of some potential, but rather a liberation from the consequences of a mistaken assumption about the nature of our experience. An analogue to this is apparent on those precious occasions when one is overcome by the sheer, empowering relief which can accompany the dissolution of a conviction, in the face of some transformative new awareness.

In the foregoing I have sought to develop some understanding of a Buddhist perspective by considering its tradition of praxis in terms of a hermeneutic of presence and its tradition of theory in terms of a hermeneutic of change. As has been noted in the preceding chapter, the backgrounds and motivations for undertaking meditation among retreatgoers vary considerably, one of the consequences of which is that Buddhist theory is of limited explicit importance for some. However, its significance for this study is that it pertains to details of the Buddhist perspective on life which do inform the practice. Moreover, a heuristic agency governs meditation; mindfulness meditation is the means by which insight arises. It does not depend entirely upon foreknowledge; neither can it proceed in the presence of expectations, whether these are about resolving some personal conflict or attaining an insight into impermanence.

Meditators often (though not always) come to the practice with quite specific issues they seek to resolve. However, any ideas of what is or should be – even "Buddhist" ones – are a kind of overlay which, during the moments they are present, precludes bare attention. It is also true that whatever their conscious understanding of this theory might be, meditators' experiences often seem to echo the themes we have considered in this chapter: sensitivities towards the ephemeral nature of life; difficulties encountered in living with pain, distress, or uncertainty; deepening questions concerning identity or their purpose in life. Although meditators' insights in the preceding chapter may not in each case attain the profound and resounding generality which characterises them as agents of awakening, in the Buddhist understanding, these more "everyday" insights into the

particularities of meditators' lives have, nonetheless, often reverberated with the deep issues explored in the present inquiry.

NOTES

[1] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, xxviii.

[2] As well as providing an insightful analysis of the Buddha's social milieu, in which an increasing urbanisation is cited as contributing to the stresses of his times, Richard Gombrich remarks interestingly on the possibility that increased diseases encountered in the wet Gangetic plains made the frequent metaphor of Buddha-as-physician an especially appealing one. See his, *Theravada Buddhism: A Social History from Ancient Benares to Modern Colombo* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1988), 55-59. Bimal Krishna Matilal, "The Perception of Self in Indian Tradition," in *Self as Person in Asian Theory and Practice*, ed. R.T Ames, W. Dissanayake and T. Kusalis (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1994), 282, indicates that this model was or became prevalent in Indian religious systems generally.

[3] Unless otherwise indicated, Buddhist terminology will be given in is Pali form.

[4] These eight features of the path are: "right" (*sammā*) (1) view or understanding (*diṭṭhi*), (2) thought or intention (*saṅkappa*), (3) speech (*vācā*), (4) action (*kammanta*), (5) livelihood (*ājīva*), (6) effort (*vāyāma*), (7) mindfulness (*sati*), and (8) concentration (*samādhi*). Buddhist traditions claim that the first two features cultivate wisdom, three to five cultivate morality, and that the features six to eight develop the mental faculties through meditation. Both the eight features of practice, and these three broader elements function interdependently.

[5] The *Sutta Piṭaka* contains the teaching discourses of the Buddha and is divided into five large sections, or *nikāyas*. The *Vinaya Piṭaka* contains rules for monastic discipline, which are contained in concrete stories of early monastic life.

[6] While the relationship between these two disciplines of meditative practice will not be described in extensive detail for present purposes, it can be noted that significant questions have yet to be satisfactorily answered, for instance that of whether *samatha-bhāvanā* can, on its own, lead one to the goal of *nīrvaṇa/nibbāna*. Their relationship is clearly explored in Winston L. King's, *Theravāda Meditation* (University Park PA: The Pennsylvania State Univ. Press, 1980), 108-15. Important questions are raised in an informative article by Paul Griffiths, "Concentration or Insight: The Problematic of Theravāda Buddhist Meditation-Theory," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 49, no. 4 (1981): 605-24.

[7] What might be described as the common, even, "orthodox" Therāvadin opinion is offered by Walpola Rahula in his *What the Buddha Taught*, 2d ed. (New York: Grove Press, Inc., 1974). He says of the meditative techniques for cultivating calm: "they have nothing to do with Reality, Truth, Nirvāṇa. This form of meditation existed before the Buddha. Hence it is not purely Buddhist, but it is not excluded from the field of Buddhist meditation" (68); *vipassanā*, however, "is essentially Buddhist meditation," "Buddhist mental culture" (68-9).

[8] *Majjhima Nikāya* 10: Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans., *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995).

[9] As a counter-example to the late Western-born meditation teacher Ayya Khema can be mentioned. Her teachings (in my limited experience) were directed towards *samatha* practice to a significant degree. This is treated in her, *Who is My Self? A Guide to Buddhist Meditation* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1997).

[10] *Dīgha Nikāya* 22: Maurice Walshe, trans. *Thus Have I Heard* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987.)

[11] *Majjhima Nikāya* 118.

[12] Namto, *Insight Meditation*, 10-11.

[13] Ñāṇamoli and Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, 146.

[14] These are: matter or form (*rūpa*), sensation (*vedanā*), perception (*saññā*), mental formations – which includes intention, memory, cognition (*saṅkāra*) and consciousness (*viññāna*).

[15] Mindfulness, investigation (*dhamma vicaya*), effort (*viriya*), rapture or joy (*pīti*), tranquillity or ease (*passaddhi*), concentration, and equanimity (*upekkhā*).

[16] Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification*, 136.

[17] V. Trenckner, ed., *The Majjhima Nikāya*, 5 vols. (1888; rpt. London: The Pali Text Society, 1979), 1: 57.

[18] James Risser, *Hermeneutics and the Voice of the Other* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1997), 208.

[19] As Risser explains, in view of Gadamer: "The opennness is the exposure to what confronts us." Ibid., 90.

[20] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 354.

[21] Ibid., 357.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Ibid., 490.

[25] The fact that some divergence exists among Buddhist traditions as to the *reference* of this certainty and confidence complicates but does not negate this.

[26] Michel Foucault, "Technologies of the Self," in *Technologies of the Self: A Seminar with Michel Foucault*, ed. L.H. Martin, H. Gutman and P.H. Hutton (Amherst MT: The Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 18.

[27] Ibid., 26.

[28] Ibid., 35.

[29] Prin. Vaman Shivaram Apte, *The Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary*. rev. ed. (1957; rpt. Kyoto: Rinsen Book Company, 1978), 1488.

[30] I owe this information to Dr. Dad Prithipaul, who was informed of this practice by a Tantric teacher in India.

[31] Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 56.

[32] T.W. Rhys Davids and William Stede, eds. *The Pali Text Society's Pali-English Dictionary* (1921-1925; rpt. London: The Pali Text Society, 1979), 9.

[33] Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 367-68.

[34] *Dīgha Nikāya* ii. 155: see Walshe, *Thus Have I Heard*, 187.

[35] *Aṅguttara-Nikāya* iv. 128; Nyanaponika Thera, trans. *Anguttara Nikaya* (Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society, 1981), 98-99.

[36] E.g., the *Mahāvagga I* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* cites a series of great wonders which are performed by the Buddha; see I.B. Horner, trans. *The Book of the Discipline (Vinaya Piṭaka)*, vol. 4 (London: Luzac & Company, 1971), 1-129.

[37] Jorge Luis Borges, *Seven Nights*, trans. E. Weinberger (New York: New Directions Books, 1984), 66.

[38] Tom J.F. Tillemans, *Materials for the Study of Āryadeva, Dharmaphāla* and *Candrakīrti*, vol. 2 *Texts and Indexes* (Wien: Arbeitskreis für Tibetishe und Buddhistische Studien Universität Wien, 1990), 196.

[39] Rhys Davids and Stede, *Pali-English Dictionary*, 627, 447.

[40] Bhadantācariya Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purification (Visuddhimagga)*, trans. Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli (4th ed. Kandy: Buddhist Publication Society 1979), 481.

[41] Apte, *Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, 866.

[42] E.g., *Mahāvagga* I. 6. 35; *Dīgha-Nikāya* ii. 42. See Maurice Walshe, trans. *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 216.

[43] I have explored its centrality in early Buddhist thought in "Buddhist Causality and Emptiness: A Comparative Study of the *Nikāyas* and Nāgārjuna," M.A. thesis, University of Calgary, 1988.

[44] E.g., *Majjhima Nikāya* ii.32: Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, and Bhikkhu Bodhi, trans. *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha: A New Translation of the Majjhima Nikāya* (Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1995), 655.

[45] Jorge Luis Borges, "The God's Script," in *Labyrinths*. eds. D.A. Yates and J.E. Irby (New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1962), 171; cited in Anne Carolyn Klein, *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen: Buddhists, Feminists, and the Art of the Self* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995), 135-36.

[46] *Dīgha Nikāya* ii.36: Maurice Walshe, trans. *Thus Have I Heard: The Long Discourses of the Buddha* (London: Wisdom Publications, 1987), 213.

[47] David Loy, "Avoiding the Void: The Lack of Self in Psychotherapy and Buddhism," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*. 24, 2 (1992): 169.

[48] Michael McGhee, "The Turn Towards Buddhism," *Religious Studies* 31(1995): 84.

[49] See Shinzen Young, "Purpose and Method of Vipassana Meditation," *The Humanities Psychologist* 22 (Spring 1994), 58-59.

[50] Loy, "Avoiding the Void," 166.

[51] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Writings*, 297.

[52] Ibid., 294.

[53] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 362.

[54] This and several of the ideas presented here owe much to a lengthy convervation (June 9, 1998) with, and a series of unpublished lectures given by the Venerable Madawela Puññaji, from whom I have learned a great deal over the years.

[55] Matilal, "The Perception of Self in Indian Tradition," 281.

[56] K. Tanahashi, ed. *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dogen* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1985), 70 ; cited in David Loy, "Avoiding the Void: The Lack of Self in Psychotherapy and Buddhism," *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 24, 2 (1992): 173.

[57] See Steven Collins, *Selfless Persons* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1982), 92-95.

[58] Ibid., 263.

8

'ANAGOGY' IN THE FACE OF WONDER

It is odd that after the labours of each of these chapters I face beginning once more, once more not knowing how to begin or what to say. This final chapter needs to be a summation of what has developed (or erupted in spite of itself) in the foregoing, an excursion into the teaching of meditative practice as well as those relational modes of being which are congenial to wonder, and an envisioning of what these matters might say to the wider field of curriculum. Much earlier, in Chapter Three, I offered a discourse on retreats that issues from my own experience. I hoped that it might be an evocative way of situating this context honestly, "tellingly," in the lifeworld. Indeed, David G. Smith comments on the significance of such a "report" in hermeneutic work, one which in my case is as yet only partial:

> The conversational quality of hermeneutic truth points to the requirement that any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report of the researcher's own transformations undergone in the process of the inquiry; a showing of the dialogical journey, we might call it.[1]

Where once I was happy to oblige, however, I now find myself resistant, on edge, oddly disquieted. Something about disclosing my experience of teaching in retreats, of the modes of pedagogy which I have experienced to be present (and absent) there, and formulating phenomenologically distinct themes from which may be drawn concrete points for scrutiny disconcerts me, it seems. At present, I'm unsure why.

Is it that I am disturbed about the possibility of disclosure itself? I don't think so. It is not so much this as the lack of clarity about what is to be shared; perhaps, to adopt the Socratic metaphor, I'm suffering normal birthing pains yet again, and am in need of a good maieutic companion. More likely, my disturbance is a function of presently "working through" *aporias* of whose dimensions I am only vaguely aware. But in the face of all this a persistence is called for. Madeleine Grumet suggests that this willingness to engage in such particularities is necessary for teaching. Speaking from an appreciation of autobi-

ography as a critical means for bringing the intentionalities we practice into consciousness, she observes that

> To teach as an art would require us to study the transferences we bring to the world we know, to build our pedagogies not only around our feeling for what we know but also around our knowledge of why and how we have come to feel the way we do about what we teach.[2]

I am struck, for instance, by the degree to which further critique might enliven many of the subjects and foundations of this study – a critique in which I would necessarily be implicated, of course, since the study has in the first place issued from my own interests, experiences, and questions. For instance, what dimensions of "Buddhism" – as yet, silent in this work – are complicit in the bloody rivalries carried out by soldier monks of certain Japanese sects during the Heian and later periods?[3] Until recently, why, since the seventeenth century, did the office of the Dalai Lama entail defacto sovereignty over much of Tibetan political and economic, in addition to religious, life? What are the "Buddhist" dimensions of the prolonged and intractable civil war in Sri Lanka? Buddhism has its roots in ascetic culture; its meditative practices arose out of the religious concerns of renunciates whose own culture – as well as the surrounding one – was plainly patriarchal. Textual antipathy towards women could be cited; both feminist critique and reconstruction are possible.[4] Although not raised in the foregoing, to what degree are its understandings of suffering and no-self (not to mention *nirvāṇa*) contingent upon factors unique to the Gangetic plains of the sixth or fifth centuries B.C.E. (and thus incommensurate with our own times)?

Nor would such a critique end with Buddhism. What of Heidegger, to whom I have adverted rather frequently, and who has been described by Richard Rorty as "a coward, a liar and the greatest philosopher of the twentieth century"?[5] What traces have I ignored or failed to follow in a thinker who evidently maintained to his death some measure of enthusiasm for National Socialism, and whose resounding post-war silence in regards to the Holocaust was broken only by pronouncements of what George Steiner calls the most "intolerably shrewd and evasive" kind?[6]

For that matter, what of wonder itself? In a remarkable study of the European conquest of the "New World," Stephen Greenblatt incisively analyses the discourse of the soldier-explorers, for whom everything in this world (plants, animals and all aspects of its peoples) were marvels, wonders – and therefore *others* to be conquered, domesticated, util-

ised or discarded. In doing so he covers some of the same ground that we have, earlier, but to very different purpose:

> The qualities which gave wonder its centrality to this [European representational] practice also gave it its ideological malleability. For the perception in Descartes or Spinoza that wonder precedes recognitions of good and evil, like the perception in Aristotle or Albertus Magnus that it precedes knowledge, conferred upon the marvelous a striking indeterminacy and made it – like the imagination to which it is closely linked – the object of a range of sharply differing uses.[7]

And elsewhere, regarding the seeming inability among the conquerors to respect the differences between the inhabitants of these lands and themselves (or, for that matter, to observe with any sympathy their human and cultural affinities):

> Wonder effects the crucial break with an other that can only be described, only witnessed, in the language and images of sameness. It erects an obstacle that is at the same time an agent of arousal. For the blockage that constitutes a recognition of distance excites a desire to cross the threshold, break through the barrier, enter the space of the alien.[8]

As Lawrence Weschler recounts it, it is to the tragic, rapacious excess of colonial plunder which resulted from this hermeneutic that the European *Wunderkammern*, "wonder-cabinets," owe their genesis. In these precursors to modern museums all manner of "catholic and deliriously heterodox"[9] items were displayed before a European public whose *"mind was blown"*[10] by them – not to mention by the incomprehensibly enlarged and strange world these curiosities represented. Weschler's fascinating account focusses on what may justly be described as a "weird and wonderful" establishment known as the Museum of Jurassic Technology. In the words of its director, David Wilson, the museum's purpose is "to reintegrate people to wonder" by bringing patrons to a place where they find themselves (in Weschler's) "shimmering between wondering *at* (the marvels of nature) and wondering *whether* (any of this could possibly be true)."[11] If Wilson's interest is at least remotely akin to mine, we encounter in Greenblatt's analysis uses and abuses of wonder which are quite absent in the present study.

Beginning Again: *'Self-doubt'*

Is *this* – the various, telling absences which have been silent in this work save for these brief allusions – what is disturbing me, at present? To be honest, I do not think so. To what, then, do the contesting economies of awareness and confusion within me, regarding the matters now before us, currently pertain? A pair of issues is implicated: it seems to hinge upon my periodic reluctance to teach and the fairly persistent obscurity

of my understanding of "self" as a locus of experience. Let me just say that when I was first encouraged to teach at meditation retreats I can recall experiencing a crisis of identity. Echoing the internal currents of doubt as to my suitability to undertake this activity my dilemma eventually came to rest upon the issue of taxonomy: the name I developed for this role is "designated friend" but "student-teacher" works nicely, as well – a conceit to which I have adhered more or less until now. I have regarded my own position an intermediary one, a student who from time to time undertakes a teaching function. On the one hand it cannot be otherwise: teachers do not cease being students of the practice, are not a special variety of practitioner. Even where teachers come to their roles with considerable practical, intuitive and technical resources they do not cease being meditators, or students – even, in a crucial sense, "beginners." But I admit to additional, more personal, reasons for my circumspection: certain teachers I've worked with have exhibited such masterful qualities that I tend to tread lightly around the fully-fledged "teacher" label as much as anything out of respect.

Further compounding my reluctance to treat the matter of pedagogy, during the most recent meditation retreat I attended (as a meditator and occasional assistant) – a ten day session a couple of months ago – there developed in me a decisive sense of my inability to continue to "teach." Not that I have become any less convinced of its value in the meditative context, you understand, but because any sense of having anything *to* teach was utterly dispelled during this time. Owing to these reflections I am inclined to suggest that my current perplexity has to do with the fact that teaching as an intentional activity exposes the questionability of this vexing "self" – a questionability which for reasons discussed in the preceding chapter may become more pronounced in the meditative process itself.

It seems I need to remember – or be *mindful* of the fact – that this is not likely to be something I will resolve by "thinking it over." David Loy, whose writings on the notion of no-self in Buddhism are as probing as most anyone's, observes that

> Rather than being self-sufficient, consciousness is more like the surface of the sea: dependent on unknown depths that it cannot grasp because it is a manifestation *of* them. The problem arises when this conditioned consciousness wants to ground itself – i.e., to make itself *real*.[12]

and here:

> It is the ineluctable trace of nothingness in my "empty" (because not really self-existing) sense-of-self that is experienced as a sense-of-*lack*; in reaction, the sense-of-self becomes preoccupied with trying to make itself self-existing, in

> one or another symbolic fashion. The tragic irony is that the ways we attempt to do this cannot succeed, for the sense-of-self can never expel the trace of *lack* that constitutes it insofar as it is illusory....[13]

While the paradox of "beginning" has been encountered as a struggle before now, I have come to think of this as being because of its fundamental impossibility, since we are always already *underway*. Perhaps now I should add that to begin is also difficult precisely because it provokes a habitual, deeply founded (and, after Loy: because fundamentally *unfounded*) sense of lack. Why? because – at least in Buddhist terms – it confirms to me yet again the questionable ontology of *who* is beginning. This, it would appear, is just what the question of teaching, and every other question in which "beginning" has been evoked in this study, have done. And yet, it is by no means only regarding issues of ontology that we encounter the problematic dimensions which inhere in the pedagogy of meditation.

Teacher as Fallible

Several years ago I was instructing (student-teaching, acting as a designated friend...) at a retreat. One of the meditators was a young man, an accountant named Dave, with experience practising another form of meditation. It was his first exposure to retreat practice. In our initial conversation I gleaned this and spoke about points of the method I thought he would need. Our talk was slightly awkward, but neither of us knew the other and so I simply tried to convey these matters to him. We spoke again the next day. He was rather distant, as though occupied with the particulars of some issue which he was unwilling or unable to articulate. Indeed, Dave made brief mention of an experience which had troubled him, but offered no details. I didn't try to probe. When he spoke it jarred a bit, as though his words had not yet gauged themselves to the group's silence, or perhaps his own. It is unlikely that silence was the source of his disquiet, but as it turned out there was little other measure I would be able to take of the matter. Late into the second day a note on my meditation cushion informed me that he had left.

Dave's sudden departure left me with an uncomfortable residue of incompletion and when I returned home, of those people who had attended it was this man who most often came to mind. Wanting to ensure that he was okay, I eventually decided to try to reach him by phone. This seemed appropriate given two factors: a lingering concern over what I thought might be his inexperience with disconcerting events (i.e., experiences which can be strikingly unfamiliar), and the friendly (apologetic, complimentary) tone of his note. In it, he had thanked me for my help and expressed some dismay –

seeming a bit ashamed – at having to leave. It occurred to me that he might not feel free to make contact with me. What if he was struggling to make sense of some uncomfortable image prompted by the meditation? (At least I could assure him that they are not so uncommon – that might be helpful....) I finally succeeded in reaching him one evening, several weeks after the retreat. Our brief conversation went something like this:

- Hello Dave? This is Philo. We met at the retreat last month?
- Oh, hi.
- I hope this isn't a bad time to call. The note you left for me indicated a bit of a problem had come up during the retreat and I just thought I should make sure that everything's okay. How are you?
- I'm fine. Thanks.
- Good... well, since we had no further opportunity to talk you came to mind every once in a while. Glad to know you're well.
- Yeah, everything's fine... but (*his voice hardens slightly*), I don't know if there's much more to say, really.
- ... okay then, sorry to have disturbed you.
- You didn't disturb me.
- Right... that's good. Well, take care.
- Bye.

After hanging up I sat by the phone, still unsettled but also feeling a bit foolish. It occurred to me, now, that his note might have been worded to some extent with my feelings in mind. I reminded myself that he could have spoken with me at the time but had chosen not to. I was sensitive to his lack of confidence in me and worried that making contacting like this might have made matters worse for him. I hoped that whatever had occurred during the retreat and however he interpreted my call would not "put him off" from retreats in general; I reminded myself that attending a meditation retreat may not be what everyone needs at any given time. And so on. Suffice it to say that various questions regarding the duties of a teacher have continued to arise in the ensuing years. Recently I spoke with a long-time meditator about such issues:

PH: What do you think a teacher's responsibilities are? Is it really a complex thing, or something that can be expressed quite simply?

Vickie: You know, I've been thinking about that actually. I remember teachers telling me that I should teach, and always thinking: "But I don't *know* enough!" I don't think it's hard to teach the skill, the technique – it's very straightforward. Where it becomes subtle is that you don't know what the technique will bring up for the person. And I don't know what you do

when that happens... at least I don't think I know. In terms of my own practice it hasn't been difficult, in the sense that I learn a technique and go out and do it. And I haven't had a lot of what you'd call negative experiences. In those early retreats with Anagarika there was never a time when someone didn't break down crying. I remember in one retreat a meditator feeling like she was paralysed, and Anagarika going over and calming her.

PH: Do you wonder whether you'd be up to that?

Vickie: Yeah! I wouldn't have a *clue* (*laughs*). But watching her, I could tell she felt *very* responsible.

Vickie's comments indicate at least two aspects of teaching meditation: the grasp one has of the techniques for engaging in the practice, as well as a critical appreciation for what these techniques can "bring up" for meditators. In one sense the method is a specific mode for revealing the characteristics of experience, but Vickie is suggesting that considerable understanding (prior knowledge, intuition...) is required to respond helpfully to the concrete specificities of people's practice, especially where an experience is anomalous or particularly disturbing. Of course, while the instance with the meditator I have described, above, is unique – as all such exchanges are – it also underscores the contingency of human relations. Apparently lacking clear means to gain any common ground with him I was left to reflect upon my own motives and actions. A variety of blindness is evident, wherein we act because we must, not knowing how. Although their prevalence in our lives can suggest a robustness – the relationships which last a lifetime; ones which utterly *defy* termination – our human relations are also belied by a certain nescience and fragility that can prevent their flourishing and very inception. All of which brings one meditator's reflections observation to mind:

PH: Can you say something about teachers?

Sophie: That they haven't *bothered* me (*laughs*), that they've left me alone. That's what I liked about Anagarika....

(Had I *bothered* the meditator of whom I have spoken? In my self-critical moments I think it is possible.) Sophie is referring, here, to our first teacher of meditation, and it was Anagarika who, presumably seeking to quell the concerns of a student she was encouraging to teach, was once heard to remark that "in *vipassanā* there are no mistakes." Doubtless she meant, in part, that the meditation is fundamentally allowing of whatever arises to one's awareness. No untoward thought or uncomfortable emotion is a problem, at least not to mindfulness itself. But the observation was also directed towards teaching practice, and what this might mean is at present obscure. Nevertheless, it does set my

queries in a different light. I once asked a friend, one with many years' experience in teaching meditation, about this issue:

PH: Have you ever made mistakes, as a teacher?

Jason: Sometimes I do have a feeling of having made errors of judgement, either because I've misconstrued something which was related... but usually you have the opportunity to redress it. And usually it doesn't end up *being* a mistake – when they occur, it tends to offer a rich opportunity for deepening the relationship with the other person. And quite often, as a meditator, it's when your foundations are *really* rocky... when your conceptual foundation has eroded some – this is the opportunity to see things with clarity.

Taking this together with Anagarika's statement, above, it might preliminarily be suggested that since mindfulness of the texture and tenor of experience is the principal focus of this practice, "mistakes" merely become the subsequent focus of the meditator's (and teacher's) attention. While not quite so sweeping as Anagarika's observation, Jason does express a circumspect confidence regarding the consequences of pedagogical miscues or misunderstandings. It seems fair to suggest that it is not exclusively *his* abilities which he regards as relevant here, as it is a trust in the processes at work in the meditative environment, to which teacher and meditator, alike, are responding. It may well be that the degree and referent of this trust can vary among them, but its presence would seem to offer some mutual grounds upon which the generative agency of the practice, and the relationship, can function. Indeed, this is necessary wherever a praxis or art, rather than solely a technical skill, is in question.[14]

The young man of whom I have spoken, earlier, is the only meditator who has left abruptly during a retreat for which I was responsible. Yet the exigencies of the practice can, at times, bring a meditator into an especially vulnerable state, feeling raw and exposed. Many meditators have spoken of difficult issues, of course, and I recall one man, Sandy, confiding to me his growing conviction that he could not stay any longer. That it had taken a lot for him to bring himself to tell me this was evident. His demeanour, at the time, was strained; he look rather defeated. There can be a sense of obligation to continue and not "quit," and in our ensuing conversation I tried to ensure him that he must allow himself whatever rein he needed. I later wrote down some of these comments to him:

> We expect a lot from ourselves most of the time. But our duties to practice, here, are quite simple. As best as we can, the concerns we have for things like "performance" and obtaining specific "results" – and the judgement that gen-

> erates these things – should be allowed to fall away. It's easy enough to feel inadequate in the rest of our lives without being governed by this here. Consider relaxing into the meditation. See what occurs when you cultivate a gentleness towards your practice.

On this occasion, the meditator seemed relieved to confide his worries to someone; in retrospect it is natural to regard the period leading up to this as the low point of the retreat for him. By the day's end Sandy's mood seemed to be easing; at the retreat's conclusion he seemed genuinely grateful to have been present, pleased to have continued or "seen it through." And yet, I have never seen this meditator again, either.... Does this *mean* anything? What hermeneutic ought one to bring to the presences and absences, the comings and goings of this practice? Was I a good teacher to Dave? to Sandy? For that matter, given the halting nature of my relations with the former – relations which were *questionable* in the sense that we might legitimately ask what they actually consisted *in* – can I be described as having been a "teacher," at all?

Teaching as Consensual

It is only relatively infrequently that conversations between meditators and teachers literally hinge upon the issue of a practitioner's "stamina," or the crises or anomalies of meditative experience. As has been shown in Chapter Six, most often they focus on significant but less dramatic questions or troubles:

Jerry: Is it normal to get drowsy sometimes? You didn't hear me snoring or anything I hope. Did you?

Martin: When I'm walking in the hall, once in a while I seem to loose my balance. Does that happen to everybody? The first time it happened I was really embarrassed... although I don't know why, there wasn't anyone else even in the hall.

Betty: You know, I haven't been able to watch my breath at all. It seems like as soon as I sit down my mind is off somewhere, and it's ages before I even notice that it's wandered off. Is there something I should be doing to prevent this?

Each of these questions bears upon a specific experience to which the meditator is, to some degree, attentive. Without needing to discuss, again, the particularities of this practice, it can generally be observed that even with such questions which seek confirmation or clarification a basic element of trust in the teacher to whom these meditators are speaking is evident. As an observer with an interest in a meditator's experience a teacher will bring another perspective to the questions or events which emerge during

retreats. This fresh perspective is often manifest in the environment of the interview, where the delicate issues of one's concrete experience as well as his or her application of the technique are brought into focus. But a teacher's attentive presence is not likely to begin or end here.

PH: What made your first teacher so good at teaching meditation?

Chloe: Well, I just think that she was a good observer, you know, and a very good listener who could hear between the lines. And she was great, I think, because she didn't always go by the book, she went by what was needed.

Peter: You know, a lot of times, too, I think, she admitted to me that there would just be some small thing that would catch her attention in the speech, or walk, or posture or conduct of the meditator that would just... without conscious consideration, she would just give someone an instruction – intuitively.

PH: What does a teacher bring to a retreat? What's required of them?

Monica: I think in general the gifts that I can think of are being able to look at a situation from a different angle, because often the kinds of things that have stuck in my mind would be when I've been really stuck, kind of obsessive. Often the teacher would have a different perspective on it, or would put it into a different context that allowed *me* to look at it differently. Allowed a shift. The words I'm thinking of for what teachers do don't seem quite enough: knowledge-base, sensitivity, and a compassion. But I don't know how else to describe it.... And an objectivity.

PH: Anything like a friend?

Monica: Yes, but in meditation I think that the teacher has a lot of skill and... from my perspective I don't know quite how to describe it. In some situations I haven't really been able to relate to it, it's like – "Oh wow! How did they know that?" So on my part there's a certain amount of amazement – like, "how would you *learn* how to do that?"

PH: Any examples?

Monica: It's funny. I remember bits of things. One time at the end of a long retreat, just before loving-kindness (*the closing ceremony*), I was saying something in the group and doing pretty well but got to a point in what I was saying and knew I was going to cry, and struggled not to – Jason was sitting across from me and he made me laugh, and I was alright. *Just* at the right moment.... To me it's sometimes all a bit like magic. Sometimes I'm caught up in my stuff and then suddenly something's just *fixed* (*laughs*) and I don't know quite how they did it.

Much earlier in this work, in Chapter Three, I made mention of my own surprise at a teacher's sometimes uncannily precise understandings of the complexion of my experience. In her field of vision and responsibility, one might say, those of us present were the recipients of an *experienced regard*. Similarly, Chloe speaks of a teacher "hearing between the lines," Peter, of a subtle, practised attention, Monica, of a sensitive attunement and tact. What we find are reflections which speak of a teacher's presence with meditators, wherein not only one's questions, but various gestures and moods, may be met with attentiveness and empathy. The recollections above take us beyond what is normally understood by "another point of view," as when one garners various opinions in order to make an informed decision. Monica has referred to a teacher's objectivity, but one enriched by sensitivity and compassion. In such cases the somewhat distant ocular metaphor ("perspective," "viewpoint") is animated by an interest in the other. An early meaning for "observe" was to "attend to in practice"[15] – which implies a watchfulness, or, a mindful engagement. That is, the teacher *draws near* and achieves, in such instances, a middle ground wherein she or he may be described as *observant*. It is crucial to add that this manner of being present on the part of the teacher functions in an environment of mutual confidence.

The following conversation with Jason serves to introduce themes to which I will refer in the next section, since they reflect a teacher's approach to meditative practice which inform his or her questions and counsel. More than this, it reflects this teacher's manner of being present to conversations during retreats and those everyday questions which tend to emerge.

PH: How would *you* begin this interview?

Jason: I guess I'd ask me how it's going, what was happening: but that's just checking.

PH: A sense of the terrain?

Jason: Yeah. Gives me a sense of how people are feeling with the method... the doing.

PH: *How* they say it?

Jason: Right, and how *alert* they are to their experience. They may think they're not doing things well, but their awareness of their sleepiness or thinking or whatever, tells you a lot about their mindfulness.

PH: So, what would be a *bad* sign?

Jason: I think that I don't *look* for that. I look for where they have *been* mindful. And suggest means of reinforcing that. I don't often look for where they haven't been. I think what I should be looking for is a moment where they acknowledged for themselves that this was a moment when I was aware,

present. It doesn't really matter what the moment is. Lots of times the person will be feeling unhappy, or bored and think they're not doing it right. But I'd want them to be aware of that. *That's* success. It doesn't matter what's going on.

PH: Is it important that people not be discouraged for long? Do you see that in part what you're doing?

Jason: Yeah, there is that. But discouragement is quite common. A person spends an hour and a half being bored and know they could be doing any number of things. Generally, I take it where it goes.

This teacher's reflections offer several indications of his means of inquiring into meditators' practice. As one would expect, he is attentive to what they are doing – the specific technique they are practising – which as Vickie suggested earlier can prompt particular ranges of experience. Next, there is the question of *how* they are doing. This latter issue is not a performative one – he is not looking for precise results. Rather, "success" is measured simply by the meditator's attentiveness to whatever is arising, or as he says, by "how alert they are to their experience." From these remarks, it would not seem that judgements about the quality of a meditator's practice are especially pertinent. Instead of generating concern for the fact that *this* or *that* has arisen in experience the meditator is being encouraged to note what is happening, *whatever it is*. Even discouragement (we might add: pain, boredom, irritation...), as such, is not more significant or detrimental than other, more conventionally "positive," experiences.

What can be observed here might be described as a natural adjunct to the meditative technique which has been presented in preceding chapters. That is, rather than a light interest being focussed on one's own practice, in this case the teacher is directing the same manner of attention to the meditator's experience as it is expressed in conversation and gesture. In this way a teacher brings his or her practice into the arena of the interview, where it is applied and made evident to the student. As such, a form of influence is present. For instance, van Manen writes of a pedagogical "influence" in which the agency of *communication* rather a strict causality is present: "In a broad sense, influence connotes the openness of a human being to the presence of another."[16] It is clear that because he or she is being attentive to a meditator's words and manner the teacher is subject to influence, in this sense. When this openness is *mutual* real communication or influence emerges. And at times such influence can be experienced by the student (or teacher) in a *powerful* manner, as a palpable, infectious confidence, something which encourages (or empowers) one – perhaps simply to begin again or "take heart."

Like other aspects of the relationship, responsibility modulates primarily according to the experience of the student. That is, while the fact that adults are involved here suggests that the relations are symmetric, there remains something of the asymmetry which is found in other types of pedagogical relations, wherein forms of responsibility are active.[17] In relation to a student sensitive to the nature of the practice, the teacher's responsibility may be relaxed. Another student (or the same student at a different time) may need careful attention in order to ensure as much as possible that he or she understands the practice clearly. In any case, the teacher is responsible to assist the student in developing a clear, functional understanding of how to practise, in practice. There is more than this however. It is that to be a teacher is to be oriented towards and responsive to the authority, the power, of the student's situation. The presence of kindly interest or regard is vital in order to animate this orientation of the teacher. Indeed, the Buddhist context explicitly promotes the qualities of loving-kindness (*metta*) and compassion (*karuṇā*) here. While technical experience provides necessary background, therefore, this active extension of regard is as necessary to the act of teaching. Not that any of this will prevent, say, emotional incident or shoulder pain – the teacher's responsibility does not extend to *the particulars* of a student's experience. Furthermore, even with this tenor of regard, the dynamics of practice preclude predictability and certainty. That is, suggestions and comments made with discretion, intuition and the best intentions may not always be *right*. Yet the practice of mindfulness is itself the arena within which these suggestions are "tested." Such as they are, "mistakes" are therefore made within a rather commodious environment: given the nature of this meditative practice, insofar as one can speak of it, "success" in practice arises not because certain experiences arise, but merely because one is, from moment to moment, mindful of that which *does* arise.

Earlier, I raised the question of my relationship, or lack thereof, with Dave, the meditator who left in the middle of a retreat. Clearly, little or no influence of the type mentioned above emerged in this case. This is not to say that our brief meetings were not influential, or that they were without consequence, however, which would be quite misleading. But it can be seen that, for whatever reason, those conditions which permit the sort of communication described here had not developed.

Therefore, I suggest that the student-teacher dynamic occurs to the degree that a certain atmosphere, or "space" exists. One might say that it is given life or set in motion within a field of regard promoted by the practice in which both the student and teacher partici-

pate. Moreover, I suggest that the space which allows the relationship to function is fundamentally conditioned by what may be termed *consent*. Literally (i.e., *con-sensus*) this is a feeling or sensing together. Consent implies that the relationship is both free and mutually sustained. This is not to say that consent is granted once and for all – one's confidence in someone is seldom limitless; it may have quite clear bounds; consent may steadily emerge or oscillate as each new encounter or conversation yields its own demand or invitation for this form of openness. It is conceivable that a student may not be conscious of this dimension in the relationship. Aspects of dependence or attachment may intrude. Two related conditions may contribute to this: reliance upon technique and/or reliance upon the teacher.[18] Nevertheless, of importance here is that while consent need not be present for the student to begin practice, this consent must be present and acknowledged in the perspective of the teacher. Without it the relationship itself is in jeopardy. When not yet present in the student, what must occur in such cases is that the consent of the student be held by the teacher *in trust*. In this way a resonant space is present which continually permits and promotes the student's participation in the dynamics of practice in relation to the teacher. It is this perpetual cultivation of consent, I suggest, which is most prominent in ensuring that space which allows student-teacher relations to develop.

All of which prompts me to make a final point. We have seen that the teacher's attitude towards the student's experience and practice has a non-judgmental tone, being primarily interested in the fact that mindfulness is present rather than in what it is present to. A space is spoken of, which can foster communication and forms of influence that encourage or empower; consent has now been identified as essential, as well. Each is conspicuous in animating the particular atmosphere which permits the student-teacher relationship to thrive. But note – *they are also elements of the practice itself*, to which meditators are intentionally oriented. Thus, just as we once saw that "silence" can be sustained even within forms of speech which resonate to it, here we see that student-teacher relations are in a vital sense promoted by and expressions of that very practice in which these relations are situated.

Teacher as Practised

> *When you have learned the truth, you will be able to help others, sometimes with words but mostly through your being. As for conversing about Dharma, I am not so adept at it. Whoever wants to know me should live with me. If you stay for a long time, you will see. I myself wandered as a forest monk for many years. I did not teach – I practiced*

> *and listened to what the masters said. This is important advice: when you listen, really listen. I do not know what else to say.*[19]
>
> – Achan Chah

Being a teacher may not mean being the most experienced meditator (whatever *this* might mean) but in a straightforward sense simply entails a consent to undertake the responsibilities of this role. The manner in which a person becomes a teacher – that which authorises him or her – varies considerably. In the West this might on occasion be a matter of one choosing to do it; in traditional Buddhist cultures it may involve rather formal means of situating one in a lineage and the public bestowal of a title. Whatever the circumstances, a significant degree of practice is assumed. Teachers' qualities vary considerably as to personality, of course, but also as to their approach to matters like discipline and technique. It is commonly understood that an excellent instructor of meditation for one person may not be ideal for another. Especially when speaking from the traditional context, where a long-term relationship was assumed and considered ideal (but this observation holds true in our own, as well), the importance of mutual regard is recommended. Sobin notes that

> We can only learn from personal experience.... Teachers, of course, have various levels of spiritual development and teaching styles can demonstrate considerable differences. Observing other students of the teacher may be helpful, but it is not infallible. Both student and teacher have to observe each other over a long period of time, under varying circumstances, using intelligence and compassion.[20]

What I wish to focus on here is the degree to which a teacher is someone for whom practice remains vital. As will be seen, I mean this in two ways: in that the practice/experience of the student achieves a kind of priority for a teacher, and, in the present context, as one's own teaching is based upon an ongoing familiarity with the variations and moods of a practice in which she or he engages. It may be, as with Anagarika Dhamma Dinna and Achan Sobin – two of the teachers who figure in this study with whom I have the most experience – that practice can often attain a "natural" tenor, as when mindfulness is keen to what might be called (with a qualification once noted) a "habitual" degree. For instance, I have gone to confer with the Achan only to find him catching up on his correspondence – and discovered that this activity has in no way noticeable to me impeded his alertness to the subtleties of meditation practice. (This, while I've been "hard at work" minutely watching my breath, my walking steps, and the taste of luke warm soup!) And this is what the words of Achan Chah, in the epigraph, powerfully convey: a person so at ease with himself and others that he is *willing* – it happens

anyway, but few acquiesce to "what happens" in quite this way – to let his own manner of being in the world stand as a teaching in its own right. Yet, as his words also demonstrate, this ease is but one mark of a practice long-since begun, a practice of such obedience (from *audīre*, "hear") to the life around and within him that listening rather than speaking has become a vocation.

A teacher of meditation is also a participant, of a certain sort. As an example, in retreats at which I have instructed I find that I am able actually to participate in the sessions of sitting and walking meditation to varying degrees. On some days, considerable time may be engaged with seeing people privately, while during others, long periods will be spent in the meditation room. While it is true that I never feel altogether "off duty," opening my eyes on occasion to look at other meditators (the fellow with that question about technique, earlier; the person in the corner who is new to the practice; the woman having trouble with back pain...), this is not generally a "disturbance." It is simply the form my practice takes at these times. At a recent retreat, led by a visiting teacher, fully one quarter of the twenty or so participants also performed with some regularity a teaching role. But these responsibilities were lifted now, permitting each to return fully to the practice which has presumably animated their teaching from the start.

The following interview with Jason, which took place during a retreat, centres on some general remarks about practice and focusses on the experience of boredom.

Jason: Someone joked today that I don't seem too concerned that they're bored. Our discussion around this was about observing our moments of experience clearly. Each moment then carries the same "weight." No one moment in the chain of moments... they all have uniform import, the same *value*. It may involve being aware of an itch on the eyebrow or contemplating the value of kindness – whatever. In this way of observing, no moment attains a higher rank than the other. To have interest in something usually means to have more interest in something in comparison to something else. It's psychosomatically exciting. But it's like we withdraw from those things, here, leaving *us* with some of the symptoms of withdrawal. The natural consequence of giving each moment importance is that they each have the same importance and it appears that the landscape is flat, so boredom is a reflection of that. It's first seen as negative but viewed from a different perspective it's a highly positive experience. "Boredom" then may offer the opportunity to see that a degree of even mindedness has developed. So... I think that this role is often giving a person a different perspective, so that the emotional prejudice they may have relating to that experience can in some measure be defused.

A relaxed mood can be discerned from these observations. As he has discussed earlier, this teacher is not looking for ideal expressions of practice but, instead, is attentive to signs of the meditator's alertness to what has presently been happening. And once again we encounter a teacher as one who offers another perspective. In his delineation of boredom, however, indications of his own practice are present. That is, while applicable to the student at this time, these observations have been derived from the rich arena of Jason's own experience. His intent throughout is to promote a shift in the student's perspective such that "even" an experience such as boredom can be acknowledged for what it is.

Dennis, below, reflects sensitively on a quality which is tacit in the tone of Jason's reflections – and evident elsewhere – but only now identified: kindness. He also articulates some of the dynamics of the student-teacher relationship, and how they can have a bearing upon the student's ability or willingness to continue.

Dennis: These days, the quality that stands out in my mind is... *kindness*, I think, above everything is a quality that I resonate towards. In fact I would say that all of the teachers that I've had the good fortune to meet over time have had that quality. It's usually indicative of their own practice and their own commitment to practice. It's something that surfaces as the most prominent part of their character, because without kindness and gentleness it's difficult for the practitioner to develop the confidence in the teacher... given sometimes that the process of the practice can be very difficult, and if the person doesn't have the confidence that the teacher is guiding him or her in a positive direction, I think that the tendency might be to give up, or to feel that somehow this process isn't worthwhile. And I think that after you've had the time to be with the instructor for a while a person gets a sense of the instructor's *own* path, and some of the difficulties that they've endured. And through all of that I think that's how you establish a bond with the teacher.

The undercurrent of kindness present in the tone of many of the reflections in the foregoing is in this case identified to be central. Dennis' remark is both apt and timely, here, for it can be all too easy in such investigations to omit precisely those characteristics which help sustain *any* ennobling relationship. Kindness might be seen as an important quality which promotes consent, for instance, in that it demonstrates more than technical know-how can the evidence that another's presence is open to who we are and to our well-being. These observations also indicate how influential the bearing of the teacher's practice can be. Here, practice is not simply a reserve of experience upon which the teacher can draw for an appropriate piece of advice, for instance, but rather, that which

informs and supports the teacher, that from which he or she *speaks* – even (recalling Achan Chah) in silence.

While Dennis' comments have shown him reflecting back on several teachers, the following conversation relates to a meditator's specific experience of a single teacher, one for whom considerable respect and appreciation are clearly present.

PH: Was there a moment with the teacher that was most affirming of his "authority" – in the sense that you *saw* the depth of his understanding?

Carl: I think there were several moments. There was one which I was just simply dealing with a tremendous amount of pain – I'd been working through it for the first couple of days. The words will probably make it sound trite, but for me it was his manner and the way he handled the situation. He said something very simple, but he just said it so lightly that... we were talking a bit about the pain and how that can become the focus of your mindfulness and he just looked at me with this smile on his face, and he said, "Don't worry about the pain, Carl." And then he said that the psychological pain is way worse than any physical pain you can experience. You get up, the physical pain will be gone, you move and it will be back again, he said, but the psychological pain is a lot more difficult. And all of a sudden, from that moment on the physical pain became really secondary, it just wasn't a *problem.* So that was one really simple and gentle, and sort of carefree little exchange, but for me it was a very very profound description of pain in simple terms. I guess perhaps it was... the way he responded to questions without any hesitation whatsoever. He just knew exactly, he didn't hesitate to answer any questions I had.

A simple observation borne of experience has been offered in a tactful manner in the congenial environment animated by Carl's confidence in this teacher. Here again, the evidence of *influence* – "All of a sudden... it just wasn't a problem." Rather than being drawn to wonder about the degree to which the teacher consciously gauged his tone or the timing of this remark (as in the *technique* of teaching), it seems evident that a wisdom has been at work wherein the experience embodied by this teacher has been brought forth in the face of consent and genuine need. A gentle kindness has been present, even a touch of humour. What manner of "authority" is apparent within the complex of conditions and relations found here? Perhaps one which is animated, or authorised, by the teacher's own practice, by his deep regard for this student's experience and, no less, by the trust which is given by (or most likely, in this case, spontaneously present in) Carl. Having said this, however, it must be added that true to the life in which they partici-

pate all such moments wonderfully defy any attempts to delimit them through exacting description.

The following meditator, Suzana, is now a meditation teacher in her own right. Asked to recount her earliest experiences of meditating with her teacher, Achan Sobin (introduced earlier), she offers this dense narrative. Suzana had meditated since her youth, but had never employed mindfulness technique, which in Buddhism is regarded to be distinct from other forms of meditation. (Her mention, part way into these recollections, of "having too much concentration" relates to the much emphasised distinction in Buddhism between this quality of mind and "mindfulness," which was raised in Chapters Six and Seven.) Somewhat like the last instance, this episode is indicative of not only a teacher's meditative experience being brought into the student-teacher relationship, but of what might be called the practised nature which teaching can sometimes reveal. And it explores in a fuller fashion than recent accounts the dense workings of a student's expectations and motivations in the practice and these relations.

> My meditation practice since I was quite young had been very intense – it's my personality, I suppose – but I had come to sense that I was somehow practising incorrectly. You could say my search was not for a "master," my search was for the truth – but I didn't know what type of truth I was looking for. My background as a scientist didn't allow me to believe anything second hand. I preferred to know the taste of direct experience. I could see that my mind was full of doubt and contradictions, and I always wondered: how could a mind like that guide me to find the truth? At the same time I was independent, and I didn't listen to anyone, I just followed my way. A friend told me once: "If you only follow your ideas, it means that you believe you are the only one who is right!" To my surprise I listened to my friend and I began to see what other people had to offer.
>
> Finally, one day I found a book written by Achan Sobin. I took a look at it and soon felt I had to meet him. In the first days after arriving at the retreat centre the Achan seemed very friendly but at the same time distant, and even when he paid attention to me he did not seem urged to teach me anything. As a matter of fact, he kept questioning my interest to practise meditation and he recommended that I just "relax and take it easy."
>
> When I talked about my experience, he didn't say too much but listened to what I reported. He sounded impressed and on the one hand this was encouraging – I think to my ego – but I was also a bit put off or confused because, as I say, I had this nagging sense that I wasn't doing it right. I was hoping that he could give me instructions that would quickly clear things up. You know, after reading the book I had these assumptions of this "wise teacher." But instead he just told me to do what I always did!

> This wasn't what I wanted to hear, but then it occurred to me that he was testing me and so I consoled myself in this way. Some time later I met with him and told him what was happening in my meditation. He listened and finally said, "when you came I thought that your practice must be very advanced, but now I see that you'll have to start at the beginning." Well, my ego was so strong that I said "okay, go ahead and start teaching me from the beginning." I felt I could accept his opinion and do anything he asked of me... but instead he *ignored* me. I couldn't *believe* it (*laughter*)! Even though I tried not to let it effect me, I was quite crushed.
>
> By now I didn't know he was testing me. But then suddenly he mentioned the word "concentration" and the mind *connected* to it, and without me trying and without knowing exactly what he meant I said: "That's my problem, I have too much concentration." I was surprised I said that – I didn't know what I was talking about. Anyway, right then something happened that made me surrender to the experience. I think he knew I was ready to listen, I was ready to follow. So Achan began to practise walking meditation with me. That was when I finally knew he did want to teach me something that could help me.
>
> For a while he didn't give me any particular instruction, but I picked up something from the way he dealt with me. The next morning, I knew for sure what my problem was, and understood the meaning of the main instruction he has to give to any student that comes to him: "Go back to the moment," "Go back to see yourself," "Go back to know the mind."
>
> By now my mind and my heart opened to receive any instruction he offered to me. Achan's style of sharing the teachings was very unique. Often I couldn't understand why he did and said certain things, and some of those actions and words seemed to be in opposition to my expectations of what the teacher was supposed to be, but I was able to learn that it was his way of testing me.... In those first few weeks I argued with the him often – I suppose I am a person who is usually convinced that my judgement is correct (*laughs*). He would listen to me and then just tell me I should go back to the moment and return to practice. It went like this for some time.

This is an intriguingly enfolded instance of a teacher reflecting on *her* teacher and on the early days of her being his student while beginning the practice she now teaches. There are clearly several dimensions to the rather complex relationship emerging here. It should be noted that this all was taking place in the context of a rather lengthy retreat, which permitted a manner of unfolding in Suzana's awareness, and of their relationship, that may have been unlikely during a session of shorter duration.

Since Suzana has been most concerned to recollect her own experiences of this time, details of the teacher's manner are not in quite such evidence – his presence is, as it were, just to the *side* of this meditator and her dramatic endeavours. Clearly, she is not a person for whom "consent" as it has been described so far may be taken lightly. Indeed, it

can be suggested that the teacher's response to this meditator may be informed by an understanding of the bearing of temperament upon a meditator's practice. Even so, within the seemingly "testing" character of these student-teacher relations, practice – as well as the relation itself – is being sustained. What can be said of the consent which, I have maintained, must be present in these relations to some degree? Is this meditator contesting the necessity or character of *this*? No; I suggest that hers is simply a *spirited* consent. What we are privy to is a dialogic process regarding what this consent consists of, one which may very well echo the oscillations of certainty and doubt present to her. Not that consent, *per se*, is likely to be the subject of these animated relations, mind; rather, its existence is already vouched for by their very occurrence.

Although partially "sidelined," evidence of the teacher's presence is plentiful. Several events in her narration stand out as having a real impact on her – unsettling, surprising or confusing Suzana's frames of reference. We cannot know (just as such intentions have been opaque to us in previous accounts) precisely what the Achan's motivations have been or what has permitted *particular* moments – and not those an hour earlier, or a day later – to be the decisive ones. As always, it is crucial to bear in mind the dynamic co-emergence of a host of factors. Yet the conditions which lead her suddenly to open herself to being led in the practice – that is, which lead to her momentous "beginning" – may be said to be a sign of something. Following Bollnow, they are a sign that a true "encounter" has taken place. Bollnow's analysis of the phenomenon of encounter suggests that it is not subject to pedagogical planning – i.e., is "ultimately fortuitous"[21] – and occurs "in a strict sense only where people come together in their existential core."[22] The nature of this encounter has certainly forced Suzana both to look at the teacher anew and to encounter her practice anew; yet what of the Achan? To answer this it would be helpful to know when the encounter actually *began*, for it needn't be isolated to this event. It seems, instead, that an encounter of some degree has long been underway – evident, equally, in Suzana's willful/willing perseverance and in the Achan's observant patience. For teaching to occur more than the unilateral interest, will, desire or hopes of any-*one* is required. A dialectic is involved. Just as mindfulness practice itself is animated in part by consent, a teacher (students, too) brings to, and *practises*, this form of consent in the relational sphere. We see, then, that in addition to thriving in environments in which student and teacher are situated in harmonious propinquity, such relations can also develop in the context of a more spirited "negotiation."

But again: what do we learn of the Achan's practised teaching within this mutual encounter? In the waiting, the respect for her unique character and consent, in the manner of intervention and gentle persistence we can observe a steady alertness to the conditions which he understands to foster her meditative unfolding. No more than well developed mindfulness can be diverted from the face of excitation or pain, his own attention to the modalities of this meditator's practice seems both gracious and imperturbable. From his view (somewhat to her side), more than looking at her he seems to be looking *for* her – for what his experience (or, his *being present*) informs him are her most enduring interests within the specific environment of a practice with which he is truly familiar. The vocation (*vocāre*: "call"[23]) he listens for and attends to issues not from some distant authority but from those contingencies within which he participates. As much as he is leading he, too, has consented to being led.

The following recollection is equally vivid but of a somewhat different in tone. Many characteristics recently articulated are present, and it suggests that the "kindness" spoken of earlier can take various forms.

PH: As a teacher, what did Anagarika do that was different?

Margo: *Whew*! I think what she did... she knew us each so well, we each had a different lesson. Even if we were all doing the same meditative technique they were all varied to match us. She really worked with what was right there. *How* she taught varied because of your nature. And she was very, very sensitive.

Once I went in for an interview. I had been sitting and there had been just a *lot* of things going on, and a lot of fear arising because I didn't know just where I was going, and then the bell rang. I thought: "Now I can move!" you know, and "I'd better go tell Anagarika what was happening." So I went and told her what was happening, and she asked, "Well why are you here?" "The bell rang." And she said, "You *missed* a moment that you'll never have again!" and then she just sat back and said (*voice softens*), "But that's okay, we all miss these moments. That one you won't find again." She got softer, but you could tell when I walked in she just... I was so surprised that she was – well, *I* thought – yelling at me (*chuckles*), you know, being very *direct*. And I think if she'd continued that line with me I'd have dissolved into tears and I probably would have left and not come back. But because she knew, she caught herself. She caught herself *in* the moment and was true to what the lesson was, which was: *stay with it*. Don't be afraid of it; look at it. You know?

Several elements in this narrative resonate with earlier accounts: teaching which is attuned to the present moment and the particulars of *this* meditator; evident regard for the student's welfare. At the same time, this is in some ways as dynamic an encounter as

any so far. It is a telling instance which reminds us of the exigent character of some meditative experience and reveals the teacher "caught" in a moment of what might be called teaching practice. Margo's own practice is sufficiently compelling to Anagarika that it elicits from her both impassioned concern and sensitive response. This, too, is a form of kindness, one which is equally generous and discerning in its expression. It seeks not what is comfortable or least disturbing but precisely that which reverberates most honestly with the student's being – notice that Margo is being urged to remain with what is occurring for her. (As usual, mindfulness practice resides exactly *here*, not with what one wishes were here or fears might be here.) I realise that in saying this we are left to determine how (if ever) such matters as a someone's innermost being could be known. But once again a student and teacher have come together in a context accepting of (or assuming) certain possibilities for human becoming – Margo need not be fully conversant in Buddhist soteriology for this more general condition to be so. All of which bears in a distinct manner on the issues of authority and responsibility. What we find here is a teacher with a stirring sort of courage and confidence – both in that which authorises her and in this student's capacity to respond to *en*-couragement. In a manner which resonates clearly with such issues, Smith observes that "[t]he interest of the teacher is not to teach, in the usual sense of imparting well-formulated epistemologies, but to protect the conditions under which each student in their own way can find their way."[24]

Yet there is an additional matter brought into focus by these observations. Both in my presentation of meditation and in the accounts of students and teachers alike reference has consistently been made to the accepting or consenting character of mindfulness practice. We have seen that the deepening acquaintance with this experience is actually germane to the student-teacher relationship itself. However, in this last narrative – and certainly in many prior ones – there can also be discerned a lucid *directedness* to be present in the relationship, the instruction, and the influence of which I have spoken.

Accordingly, two issues will need to be addressed in what follows. The first will be last: the final section of this concluding chapter will deal in part with the fact that a *curriculum* pertaining to meditation, wonder, and insight is evident throughout retreat practice, one which introduces "religious" or "spiritual" matters into the arena of educative regard. The second can be introduced now: it is that, given the "religious" or "spiritual" tenor of the instructional relations present in retreats (as well as the relative absence of

children or youth) it is useful to consider denoting this educative sphere in different terms than the "pedagogical."

Regarding 'Anagogy'

As has been evident more or less from the beginning, this work does not address pedagogy in its strict sense as the "leading or instruction of youth." More properly one can simply refer to the (phonetically somewhat awkward) term, "agogy," which can denote educative relations in general.[25] But it is also possible and more telling, I suggest, to employ the term *anagogy*. Although not exactly a neologism, as far as I can tell this usage is without precedent (not that this is necessarily a strength, admittedly). This proposal that we might speak of "anagogical relations," the "practice of the anagogue," and so on, requires background as well as a modest argument in its favour. The traditional use of "anagogic" denotes the "mystical." Medieval exegetes referred to four modes of scriptural interpretation: literal, allegorical, moral and anagogical – the last of these "revealing a higher scriptural meaning behind the literal [etc.] meaning of the text."[26] In his *Anatomy of Criticism* Northrup Frye has written in detail of this means of critical interpretation, not solely in relation to religion but also to poetics.[27] Generally speaking, as above, an anagogic reading interprets a text in terms of "higher" principles in order to elevate readers above the literal, mundane sense. Frye goes on to delineate two aspects of anagogy in poetics. First, a poem is anagogic insofar as it may become a "microcosm of all literature"[28] through its allusive density and seemingly infinite powers of extension, for instance. Next, he notes that the anagogic functions in large measure through metaphors, wherein, in their most radical (i.e., anagogic) sense anything can *be* anything. In this way, it can be said that anagogy permits the singular to breathe meaning both into the *whole* and the *other*.

Admittedly, however revealing this might be of the peculiar density of poetic language or Biblical exegetics, the use of "anagogical" in the context of education is not yet strongly suggested. However, a more fundamental (Latin: *fundus*, "bottom," "basis") reading is possible. For present purposes I am choosing to let its customary reference to the mystical dimension remain in abeyance, although much earlier in this study I noted that any consideration of wonder needs at the very least to acknowledge the overtly religious or mystical tenor of a great deal of the "wonder-ful" discourse available to us. Without ignoring this dimension, though, a more fruitful reading for our purposes is possible with a focus upon its actual etymology (with, perhaps, something of the flavour of the above readings retained). The term "anagogy" is related to the Greek *anagōgé*,

"(religious or ecstatic) elevation"; this is formed on *anágein*, "lift up, elevate." Both of these are ultimately derived from *ana*, "up, back, again, anew," and *agein*, "lead" (also the root for "pedagogy").[29]

While it can be acknowledged that in some cases interview subjects have made tacit reference to the "mystical," in the foregoing, at this stage I wish to maintain the more modest grounds upon which this inquiry began. I suggest that in this etymology we find resonances with the process of teaching involved here. That is, the meditation teacher, the anagogue, may be seen to be one who assists meditators in the practice of being present to the moment or, in an important sense, who guides the practitioner back/anew to the experience of experience, the enduring presence of change. It is therefore conceivable to speak of a leading, accompanying or teaching which is directed towards what elevates or ennobles us as human beings. While it is possible to speak of being elevated, or led "upwards," it seems that in the present context we can with as much profit refer to being guided back again, or anew, to the experiences which constitute our lives. If the insights of this practice can be understood within a hermeneutic of elevation – a principal characteristic of much mystical language – so too may it be argued that they reveal a hermeneutic of deepened and animated presence. In either case, this use of "anagogy" brings the term out of a text-specific context and into the economies of life, teaching, and meditative praxis.

Praxis as Teacher / 'Anagogue'

In previous chapters I have made extensive reference to the specific disciplines that a meditator is engaged in – to the struggles and insights that this practice can engender. What this leads me to draw explicit attention to, here, is the degree to which the true teacher in all of this is the meditator's own practice and experience. In the following passage, which continues my earlier conversation with Carl, it is this dimension of the practice which becomes evident.[30]

Carl: Usually desire is the number one hindrance that I'm dealing with, but there was this fellow next to me who was having trouble breathing – breathing quite loudly – and all of a sudden I get broad-sided by aversion... this absolutely *sweeping* hatred. This hit me out of the side, so much that I just totally *lost* my ability to concentrate on the body. All of a sudden my attention was caught by this breathing. The aversion was there.

PH: "Aversion"– can you describe the texture of that?

Carl: Well... it starts out as a frustration at being interrupted, because sometimes when I'm quite concentrated and something catches my attention

> I'll be a bit startled. That was upsetting. But the aversion goes... the focus of the aversion very quickly moves away from the source to myself, for not being able to stay mindful. And so, what I did was, I immediately decided to do loving kindness. So I started to send loving kindness to myself and then I would think about people I care for, and about my teachers and so on, and sort of get close to trying to send some loving kindness to this person as the original source of my displeasure. And I wasn't able to do that, so I'd back off and go back to myself. And I probably spent thirty minutes getting close to being able to send loving kindness to this person, till after I don't know how many times I was finally able to *genuinely* send it to this person. And then of course, being the analytical person that I am, I'm thinking to myself, "okay, am I allowed to just change the focus of mindfulness during a sit, or did my mind just fool me? was that something my mind did in order to take me away from my body meditation?"
>
> So this was a question I needed to know the answer for and the teacher was very, very reassuring and very straight on the point that we're developing these resources to be able to deal with different hindrances that come up, and he said that was absolutely the best thing to do. He really helped me to understand that I need to be able to draw upon the practices. He was very reassuring.... He would not only give an answer to your question, he was always so encouraging. And for me that's very important for someone who needs to... his ability to understand how the answer needed to be couched so that I would feel comfortable with the answer gave me a another sense of the depth and the skill with which he was able to offer instruction.

As can be seen, the final portion of this narrative relates back to the teacher – to his encouragement through advice and manner. Here and elsewhere we have seen that the teacher of meditation functions in several ways to aid the meditator in her or his practice. The nature of the role is expressed, for instance, through the quality of observation and understanding of meditative technique, by the timeliness and character of advice, and by the "practised" quality of her or his presence. But what I wish to draw our attention to now is the prominence and character of Carl's engagement in his experience, throughout. It is his practice or experience which in a real sense is "leading" him: in the self understanding he exhibits – where desire is identified as a persistent problem; in his delineation of the precise triggers for aversion, and so on – and insofar as his practice itself is constituted by (what is verified to be) a skillful response and intervention. What deserves further elaboration, accordingly, is the degree of recursion evident in his experience, wherein this ongoing practice is being mediated by his responsiveness to the influential agency of the practice itself. In this sense, his engagement would to a generous

degree appear to attain that active dialogue of theory and practice which is denoted, "praxis."

Carl's mindfulness of *what* is happening exemplifies this meditative practice as it has been presented. But he is also expressing a mindful engagement in this practice – attention, evaluation, memory, intention are each involved. During the sudden shock of aversion we do not find "praxis," but this crisis has provoked a mindful evaluation and response governed by the agencies of the practice as he understands them. Whether in these reflections he is considering method in terms of what he has read, been told, or "learned himself" from previous experience is hardly germane. In these moments his praxis is considered, informed. A rhythm can be discerned wherein the practice of loving-kindness is engaged until it encounters resistance; his subsequent reflection is theoretically informed in that he "revisits"[31] things he knows and then continues anew.

Naturally, in expressing the conditions for a meditator's praxis in this way I don't wish to imply the introversion of a closed "feedback loop." Any discussion of the multiple conditions of retreats, whether of the influences of others' silence and perseverance, or the timely reminders and asides which characterise (these newly minted) "anagogical relations" should suffice to dispel any such causal autism. Even so, it cannot be overstated that the boredom, interest, and striking arousals of meditative experience itself constitute the legitimate authority, appeal, or vocation of this praxis. This, along with the modes of becoming or insight it is understood (or believed, or felt) to engender comprise the honest, ongoing locus of student and teacher alike.

No doubt in their roles or responsibilities in meditation retreats they differ. Yet the priority (in both senses of this word) of the meditator's experience produces a gravity towards which each (in their own way) is drawn and responds. After all, it is the changing texture of these which motivates the directions and encouragement that a teacher offers. The very act of teaching is contingent upon this alert responsiveness to the student, whereas the student's first calling is to the practice. Perhaps we should speak of the authority and power of the practice? While authority and power exist, therefore, they are "located" in neither the teacher nor the student (nor in any of the other conditions), but emerge spontaneously in that fecund ground which is responsive to and supports them. Power in this sense, therefore, empowers. As we have seen, furthermore: perceived with its reception is a degree of influence, that is, a variety of "authority" – but this is an authority which empowers the recipient, and so, one which can be said to authorise. The attentive teacher, responding to a student's urgency, perplexity, or ease,

will experience the power of these moments no less than the student who becomes animated with renewed enthusiasm or resolve back into the practice. And in so listening and responding the teacher will find his or her own teaching and practice enlarged. Through the teacher's willingness to be fully present, in the act of listening to the tone of the student's questions or reflections, the teacher may actually be said to become a student. We may likewise say that in bringing lived experience to words, in this subtle and influential act of sharing, a student is truly teaching.[32] Clearly, this relationship does not affix or require a permanent status.

What these points direct us to is that modes of "hierarchy," "power," or "authority" – where these connote self-aggrandisement of one sort or another – are as it were organically foreign to this environment. *Not* that this conviction can exclude these "others," of course, for such impulses simply arise (to return to an overtly Buddhist perspective) out of the same problem of "self" or fundamental "dis-ease" which urges people to undertake the practice in the first place. (When the problem associated with selfness has become resolved neither the desire for such power over others nor the fear of/anger towards others so-disposed would arise – their presence would no longer produce "suffering"... even though it might still produce some *pain*.) But I digress.

Curriculum Vitae: An excursion

> *And Polo said: "The inferno of the living is not something that will be; if there is one, it is what is already here, the inferno where we live every day, that we form by being together. There are two ways to escape suffering it. The first is easy for many: accept the inferno and become such a part of it that you can no longer see it. The second is risky and demands constant vigilance and apprehension: seek and learn to recognize who and what, in the midst of the inferno, are not inferno, then make them endure, give them space."*[33]
>
> – Italo Calvino

In beginning these final remarks I am aware of many possible trajectories or (being more grounded) pathways which could be taken on this excursion (*ex-currere*, "run out, issue forth"[34]). Even a somewhat idiosyncratic study such as the present one begins eventually to suffer from the weight of its own earnest attentions, and at this point it might be liberating to take off on a different tack, unbounded by the gravity or centrality of those concerns to which I have attempted, in my own way, to remain true. For instance, an entire work, not simply a closing section of a chapter, could be devoted to the possibilities which our (Western) growing acquaintance with Buddhism brings to the great dialogue known as curriculum studies. (More or less as I started these reflections a col-

league brought me several large volumes of bilingual proceedings from International Conferences on Buddhist Education, held in Taiwan.[35]) I am also mindful of some of the telling absences present in this work, areas which call out for attention. Is it academic scruple or some variety of promiscuity which might urge me now to introduce new voices to those already engaged with in these pages – Emmanuel Lévinas' focus on the "other" as the grounds for ethics, Julia Kristeva's analysis of desire, Jacques Derrida's critique of the metaphysics of presence...? To re(s)train my focus once more, an important inquiry might be continued between postmodernism and meditation. Perhaps, as is alluded to with reference to the "decentred subject," they have much in common. Perhaps postmodern theory could gain something (insights?) through a serious (or methodologically playful) encounter with this practice. For there is an important sense in which meditation is, as Loy has noted, "the 'other' of philosophy, the repressed shadow of our rationality, dismissed and ignored because it challenges the only ground philosophy has."[36]

But rather than following such intriguing or suggestive tangents it is important to reflect upon where these inquiries have led and that to which they bid us attend. Permit me this brief revisitation:

Wonder has been introduced and dilated upon, respectively, in Chapters One and Four, revealing it to be a sudden exposure before the remarkable and sometimes shocking agency with which the people and things of our lives are engendered. In this sense, for instance, wonder reveals things in a "new light," "calls to us," and "brings us to a standstill" by means of its discontinuous nature – the last of these exposing us to our incessant vulnerability before life and death. The second and fifth chapters approach this principal subject from different directions: first, by inquiring into the (post)modern times in which we live, whose myriad fascinations are somehow belied (among many other things) by a breathless haste which tends to keep much of life's wonder at bay. A similar impatience is sometimes evident in philosophical inquiries into wonder, where it may be viewed to be antithetical to knowledge. Yet, beyond this we learn in philosophy of its *passionate* and *open* nature, and of its essential and perpetual bearing upon the very conditions for such inquiry. If Chapter Five articulates reasons why an interest in wonder can establish wonder's value even beyond the enthusiasms of childhood, which is sometimes taken to be its natural province, Chapter Two reveals aspects of the lifeworld which might urge one to seek the silence and meditative attention of retreats. A radical shift into the disciplined practice of mindfulness meditation is marked in Chapters Three and Six – first,

through a narrative immersion; next, in more phenomenologically detailed terms. In the alternately dense and enlivening circumstances of meditation retreats wonder, or its culmination, insight, are often compellingly encountered by participants. Prior to our present discussion of the integral analogical relations which, equally, animate and are resonant with the retreat environment, in Chapter Seven I have explored a Buddhist perspective that to a considerable degree informs them. Although bearing all the confidence of any perspective issuing from the tesselated iterations and apologetics of an ancient tradition, it has nonetheless sustained an admirable focus upon that inexhaustible life of experience which no conceptual system can encompass... or *touch*. In this, it recommends meditative development as a method for becoming present to the presence of experience, wherein we may appropriate, at last, the inescapable change through which we are constituted and upheld.

With such issues developed in the foregoing and carried in these final pages what remains is to address some of the consequences of these reflections. What follows is divided into three sections: the first, a reconsideration of wonder; the second, a reflection on the potential bearing of the aforementioned on our understandings of curriculum and anagogy; and the third, some final thoughts on the nature of retreats and the anagogical dimension.

I.

The ongoing relevance of wonder to the lives of us all has, I trust, received sufficient dilation to allow the following condensed commentary. The first two points bear in simple terms upon how any deepening acquaintance with the experience of wonder, and with the conditions of attentiveness which foster it, are vital qualities of our presence with others.[37]

(1) *An attunement to the wonder of others begins with an attentiveness to the experience and implications of wonder in our own lives.* Any impetus to bring forth what is of value in life, requires just such acknowledgement. Attentiveness to wonder and the many dimensions of experience it reveals in our lives can cultivate a sensitivity to the emergence of wonder in others, and therefore has significant implications, for instance, for the way in which one can be anagogically oriented towards students. An alertness to these lucid moments of "seeing" may reveal a new richness in those modest, commonplace moments which most often comprise the better part of each day.

(2) *To be receptive to the persistent possibility of wonder may communicate to others a manner of being present that encourages true wondering, and wonder, in them.* The attunement to wonder, above, is influential not simply to one's doing, but to one's being. Such attunement to wonder might allow us more truly to *hear* questions that arise from it, and to respond with a sensitive and discerning impulse. Such questions call for a special ear, a willingness to afford them space and respond from the depths of our experience. We can speak of being anagogically alert to a developing "atmosphere" of wonder, of being gentle in its presence, and proceeding so as not to outdistance its "pace." Attunement to the wonder which resounds in a question demands that we be willing to stand at or near to that place of astonishment and risk in ourselves. Even if we do not presently share another person's wonder, this willingness to risk (our authority, certainty, preoccupation...) is crucial. Met by such a response another's fragile questioning is supported, and becomes free to unfold further and be followed or explored.

The final three points might be conceived as initial suggestions which direct us towards an ethic of wonder:

(3) *Wonder inspires our interest.* While wonder is passive, the compelling givenness of experience incited by wonder, the "new light" in which it reveals the world, can be a potent stimulus for learning and all of our responses to the life around us. It propels us into, and establishes anew our relations with the world. This interest may be viewed as the least reflexive of active responses, that is, one which is motivated out of the least degree of self-centred concern, and so from which – somewhat unlike curiosity – one always proceeds with a manner of care. Not that curiosity need preclude such responsiveness, but the resonance between curiosity and wonder holds only so long as the expression of this curiosity – its inquiry, analysis, probing – maintains within it a living appreciation for the integrity of the other. Wonder inspires our interest in the world for its own sake; *it is difficult to over-emphasise the significance of this.* Being, as Irigaray has observed, a "movement lighter than the necessities of the heart,"[38] it suspends and renders questionable the very economies of desire which otherwise tend habitually to govern our attitudes and actions.

(4) Wonder elicits respect. An ethic of wonder becomes more compelling when it is seen that the experience urges us to respect that which it reveals. If cultivated, this respect may imbue our approach to living with a tenor of mindful and gentle regard. Notice that the "givenness" of experience in the passive, yet dynamic, face of wonder does not preclude our acting out of interest or curiosity, or acting to explore, transform or undo; it

does not diminish our responsibility to deliberate upon and critically undertake things. Rather, by bringing us to a stand-still wonder's influence tends to be one of "priority": it marks a certain *quality of beginning*. Once a beginning is sustained in this manner the presence of the other before us – *as* other – becomes resistant to transgression or disregard. A new engagement may thus be aroused in the influential wake of this honest, attentive mode of action.

(5) *Wonder reaches to the very heart of identity.* Our vulnerability in wonder, the immediacy of view it affords of the other, comes at the price of established assumptions and certainty. In wonder our experience or "world" *as conceived* is at stake. Just as it opens up and offers (sometimes *imposes*) a horizon of new questions and possibilities, the palpable discontinuity provoked by wonder also undermines the way in which our world "stands to reason" – nowhere is our vulnerability in wonder more conspicuous than here, with all that is familiar momentarily dispelled. Whether gently or disturbingly, that is, identity itself is implicated and "put into question" in the experience of wonder.

Speaking of a "wonder-sensitive anagogy" is unavoidably subtle in this regard. Being present in an alert manner to a student's wonder is an appeal for humility and tact – both because of the tenuous, living relation wonder forms with the other and because of the *defenselessness* it briefly provokes. The manner in which we see ourselves, the texture of our relations with others, and the innermost place from which we respond to our experience... deep matters of this kind are exposed to the attentive heart in wonder. It behooves us to ponder the consequential nature of the openness that occurs in this experience, where we seem – simultaneously – to find and lose ourselves.

II.

I believe that the resounding significance of wonder to any matter bearing upon human experience and development is evident from these reflections. Naturally this includes the educative dimension, wherein the young, and all of us, are implicated. Standing within this work as a whole these five points – as much as anything, perhaps, by their tone – also permit and invite a contemplation of the spiritual dimensions of life and curriculum. It may well be that considering this dimension will have nothing to "add" to the process through which a person experiences that becoming or development which is realised by being "led" (Gk. *agogy*; L. *dūcere*[39]). Perhaps we need not assume that such a person would exceed what Ted Aoki observes of a well educated person, as one who "understands that one's ways of knowing and doing flow from who one is," and who is "ever open to the call of what it is to be deeply human, and heading the call, to walk

with others in life's ventures."[40] Aoki's noble yet very humane definition in no way precludes a conversation between these domains. Note that in the end I do not seek to develop an "argument" for the immediate inclusion of the spiritual in all areas of the educative sphere, but only to follow – to consent to being led by – various reflections and intimations that have emerged in the preceding.

Although when initially introduced I attempted to seek a middle ground on which "anagogy" might be considered without necessarily entailing the "spiritual" or "mystical," it is admittedly difficult to avoid altogether these elevated references. Thus we both come full circle, returning to the original usage of "anagogic," and seem to strain somewhat the meaning I have sought to give it. It warrants saying that although infrequently discussed, spirituality is not altogether a new topic for curriculum studies. For instance, Dwayne Huebner has visited this issue on a number of occasions. Although cautious about appropriating uncritically the claims arising from apparently spiritual forms of knowing[41] (a point articulated in some detail in William James' classic, *Varieties of Religious Experience*[42]), Huebner (like James) argues for the revivifying value which an attention to what he calls "ultimate terms" can bring.[43] For him, spirituality deepens an educator's presence and responsibility within audible range of three vocations: "the call to the student results in the work of love; ... the call of the content, the work of truth; ... the call of the institution, the work of justice."[44] Most suggestive for this study is Huebner's affirmation that teaching must be grounded in the particularities of one's life,[45] and that those who follow the vocation of teaching need actively to cultivate a spiritual discipline.[46]

While acknowledgement of the transformative nature of all forms of pedagogical activity is often made, such affirmations of spirituality seem to invite a deeper encounter or consideration of curricular issues. Yet this runs counter to several "currents." For instance, contemporary cultures (not to single out our own, here) may not always give such suggestions much credence. A considerable degree of the current disdain for the possibility *of* the spiritual, let alone *that* spirituality has anything to add to our experience and understanding, arises out of a fairly ubiquitous absorption with the solaces (or promises) of consumer culture. And while there are vital insights to be learned through critical analysis and a healthy suspicion of religious claims (not to mention institutional and individual abuses of power) there is also a certain *studied* disregard for the possibility of there being *any* truth or value to the claims, observations, or practices of spiritual traditions or individuals. Donald Evans, an academic philosopher and mystic, has writ-

ten an illuminating and philosophically astute assault on what he calls the dogma of academic skepticism as to the untenability of spiritual experiences and utterances.[47] Using different means, Loy's wide ranging work would seem to a large extent dedicated to arguing for the profound value of spiritual sensibilities and practice, both for one's own "betterment" as well as for its socially transforming character. On this point Huebner offers the important thought that it is a spiritual practice which in fact is ultimately resistant to appropriation into the interests of institutional power.[48] For Loy, the deepening global malaises would benefit from disciplined attention being given to what he – following several spiritual traditions – identifies to be fundamental sources of our ignorance, craving and dis-ease.

Discussion of spirituality need not be confined to religious institutions; indeed, many would contend that this is precisely where the real life of spirituality can become ossified. Religions themselves tend to express this gulf, insofar as they contain – sometimes rather uncomfortably – both the tendency towards certain knowledge (regarding scriptural interpretation, for instance) and a continuation of institutional power, and that which leans towards the mystical, spiritual, or what are sometimes termed the "experiential" dimensions of religious life.[49] For his part, Crispin Sartwell follows similar lines to those being taken here, but where I might refer to spiritual discipline, or praxis, his principal focus is on *art*. Here, he expounds in some detail upon the spiritual dimensions of art:

> Art shows that we can love the world even in pain and death, that we can love even pain and death.
>
> That does not mean that we stop experiencing pain as pain, or that we stop experiencing loss, or the fear of being lost. On the contrary, we open ourselves to these things completely by means of art. We express in art our willingness to undergo these things. This expression is perverse, because we will undergo these things whether we are willing to or not. But this desire to open ourselves to the world even in the face of the world's cruelty is also a posture of great nobility.[50]

By suggesting that any transformation worthy of us requires an open and generous engagement with life on its own terms Sartwell's reflections on art reverberate with the fundamental consent to which I have frequently referred. A consent which informs both meditative practice and anagogical relations. Such a focus implies that an important function of the anagogical relationship is to foster this manner of consent which comprises so vital a part of human becoming. It might also be said to inform the conditions of what might be called "anagogical obligations." Although addressing somewhat dif-

ferent concerns from those of this work, in *Against Ethics* Caputo contends that obligations are constituted and instigated by the simple fact of the other's presence.

> Obligation proceeds on the assumption that what happens is all there is, that there is nothing to legitimate the destruction of what happens, so that the role of obligation is to help restore the joy to what happens, to make exultation possible, or possible again.[51]

This suggests that integral to the very grounds of our being obliged is the importance of a guidance directed towards accompanying another to find his or her own way back to the honest and inescapable agencies of lived experience. To express this otherwise: one is obliged by an anagogy whose attentiveness to others' well-being is expressed by a leading example (*agogy*) which reminds the other to (re)turn to the present, to look anew (*ana-*) at what lies before one.

My initial reluctance to link – at least as a *necessary* condition – the notion of anagogy to mysticism or the elevated discourse it presents does not issue from any of the disdain noted above. Instead, it intends two things: (1) that "anagogy" not require the otherworldly or transcendent focus which often is assumed in theologically informed experiences or traditions (and by extension, curricula), so as to permit (2) a vital (though not necessarily exclusive) focus upon the animated textures of lived experience. What it introduces into curricular discourse, I submit, is a category of explicit attentiveness to those agencies of regard which are resonant with what it means to become ever more fully who we are. It is a manner of development, moreover, which can benefit from the dedicated cultivation possible through spiritual discipline.

III.

I begin this final section with reference, once more, to the five "meditations" on wonder which comprised section one. Their ultimate reference to the odd questionability of identity which can be provoked by wonder and certain insights – not to mention by one's very engagement in mindfulness practice – prompts a final revisiting to the dedicated environment of the meditation retreat. Emphasis can be made, again, of the sensitive quality of this experience, where one's sense-of-self can be, alternately, tenuous, exposed, eased, clarified. To become further acquainted with this characteristic I refer to my own experience below. While there might be a propensity to reify experiences which become established as *text* in this fashion, it seems to me a fair response to the many people who have so candidly shared their experiences for this study – such varied experiences of relief and discouragement, irritation and awe. Far from the sublime intima-

tions which reverberate in several of my conversations with others, the following are very modest reports on retreat experience and, eventually, a teacher/anagogue's replies. I need to add that, as with my remarks in each of these final sections, my intention with the following letters is not to develop a set of definitive conclusions but, where I am able, to do further justice to the questions and virtues germane to the subjects before us.

The first is a letter I wrote to a friend perhaps a day after returning from a ten day retreat with Achan Sobin. I have referred to this retreat before now: it took place immediately prior to my completing the writing of the present work. Although my first correspondent has no formal meditation experience we have often spoken of it and, indeed, my letter was part of an ongoing conversation – sustained by our friendship and his curiosity – about what it is like:

> Dear Allan,
>
> The retreat was... tough, easy, very beneficial, unsettling, illuminating.... A quiet gratitude for having been there, a light interest in what "outcomes" will emerge.... Impossible to summarise, but laden with experience and meaning. And full of surprises – an example: I brought a tape machine to record my conversations with the Achan and told him a bit about my work. Listening to them last night I discovered that my two talks with him have been taped over! Comical, ironic and somehow typical of the kind of "erasure" I experienced through much of the time. The "group interviews" (going around the circle asking each person about the intricacies of practice) were often quite stunning. He KNEW how to respond. His understanding of the precise and varied context of meditative practice – its grammar – is utterly masterful.
>
> If this description leaves you feeling that you understand less than ever (I don't know that I've been of much help so far!) I can only sympathise.
>
> All the best, Philo

Some of these comments will become clearer in the letter below, but some of the density of retreat experience is evident in this note. Much reference has been made of the private interviews which can occur between a meditator and teacher; this may be the first time these group settings have come up. Throughout this chapter I have endeavoured to remain honest to the fundamentally open field of influence which exists during retreats even while maintaining a focus upon the student and teacher as such, in order to bring some further clarity to anagogical relations. For instance, recall the comments made by meditators in Chapter Six regarding the "teaching" offered by fellow meditators in the sitting room, or around the dinner table – perhaps I need only to *acknowledge*, at this late stage, the potency of these group sessions, in which the accumulations or culminations of a day's practice are sometimes lifted, revealed, or shaken loose in the resonant silence

which supports one's listening and speaking. In reading the last sentence I wrote to my friend, above, it strikes me even now that such things may not have been adequately expressed....

The second letter is to a different friend and written a day or two later, in direct response to request for details. Thomas has had extensive experience with retreats and meditation of a different sort, so we share many experiences of these endeavours without them being identical in their structure or "hermeneutic orientation." It is a longer letter; I began with a similar summary of the conditions, which is deleted. Otherwise the text is complete (including the various parenthetic asides).

> Hi Thomas,
>
> ... This is the first 10 day retreat I've been to for about 7 years (with the same teacher). I went into it with a new kind of readiness, I think, and also having "cleared the decks" in my own life in various ways, some quite profound, and with a type of determination. One curious result of this was that I went into, and participated in it feeling like I knew less than I did 7 or even 10 years ago. Added to this inversion was the fact that I was put into the role of an "assistant," meaning that I helped the Achan out with some minor details of organisation and teaching.
>
> His accent is very thick – the subject of lots of laughter – but his understanding and experience of the precise context of intense meditation are very profound. More than once it seemed like we were more or less open books to him. A person would have as deep an experience as they'd ever had and he'd be there, as it were, waiting. I had much appreciation simply for being present to it all. In fact, I'd had a regular welling up of joy even prior to coming to the retreat, since I had for several years very much wanted to work with him again.
>
> The practice was alternately quite easy and scouring. That is, only seldom in the 10 days did I have troubles with things like boredom (actually, never) and the practice progressed and deepened, from a certain perspective, fairly evenly. From the beginning, though – and periodically, throughout: even to the last sharing of experiences – there was the presence of a sometimes mild, sometimes acute, sense of "self" with all the angularity that goes with it, which I variously worried over and observed. And a recognition that I really knew nothing – that I had no basis from which to claim any wisdom, nothing to offer. A remarkable emptiness. Sometimes, as I say, this felt like being "scoured," i.e., feeling rubbed raw, and sometimes it was something else. At times – and this has happened before – I could clearly see how a particular thought would emerge and "stick" to me. This was experienced: the fact that certain types of thought arise out of desire to construct a self-image. I could feel the desire and the suffering of this. I sometimes had an image of a clear glass vase to which stuff adhered. Wisdom did not illumine the "nature" of this vase (i.e., from a Buddhist perspective, its insubstantiality: this is the *theory* at least, but I wasn't

interested in "constructing" an experience of it, which would be counter-productive, or I suppose, counter-counter-productive...) but the second-order process was seen very clearly in periods of deep calm and clarity.

At the end of the retreat I felt kind of flat – not in the common sense of indifference or having low affect, but more like I (a) didn't know what to "make of myself" and (b) could be patient enough to endure this state: I wasn't overly troubled by it (quite naturally, I guess, such worries haven't been entirely absent: mind seeks an object). All of the above did, however, leave me feeling utterly vacant and having no place from which to "speak" – this pertained especially to my sometimes-role of teacher at these things....

I remember that when entering the PhD programme I often expressed the hope that I might discover a "voice": I suppose/hope/assume that such fundamental experiences will allow for this to occur. During one interview with him, I told the Achan about my last few years: a regular sense of sadness about life, especially the possibility that I might die without fully *honouring* it by expressing whatever it is I'm capable of offering. He informed me that this was a state of practice, which, rather like having an ailment named, was oddly encouraging. Related to all this, somehow, is the fact that for several years I've had little interest to read more about Buddhism. I think I'd come to the end of my toleration for the gulf between understanding and experience – maybe that sounds presumptuous.

During the retreat the Achan had often made reference to the fact that he was functionally retired and that several of us there were kind of receiving his sanction to teach in this method. I appreciated his trust, of course, but had and still have NO IDEA about how I might (and no inclination to) begin this. I've had to admit that my own motivations to teach in the past were somewhat unclear. On the one hand there was considerable ambivalence, feeling inadequate and so on. On the other hand I am aware that it's had an impact on my ego. Then of course (the 3rd hand) there's the real joy it can bring, being with others in these places and appreciating the privilege of it. That I've given such a seemingly inordinate amount of energy to thinking about it – my dissertation is to a large extent devoted to it for heaven's sake! – is at the very least ironic. By retreat's end all of this sometimes left me feeling confused ("what now?") and, other times, free. This final sense of liberation (small 'f', note) has accompanied me since then. Just the feeling of being lightened a bit.

There. Is that enough?

love Philo

Given the different contexts in which these two letters were written, it is little wonder that this one contains so much more reference to certain dynamics of the practice, which my first correspondent, Allan, really didn't ask for. Was I attempting to "spare" him some of these experiences, as well? True, the earlier letter didn't warrant such an indulgent telling as this, but perhaps I was also concerned that Allan might be put off by de-

tails pertaining to the difficulty of practice, or might misunderstand the ambivalence which figures in this account.

With Thomas I seem to have less compunction about showing more fully the peculiar struggles which have accompanied my experience of the retreat. Clearly, the principal of these struggles has been the "angularity" of the experience of self, the feelings of its awkward presence in the midst of things – getting in the way, as it were. This has modulated from times of uncomfortable conspicuousness to a light, lucid observation of its ongoing formation. The latter state was an experience accompanied by great ease; reference to "emptiness" and being "scoured," though, best capture the more onerous times of discomfort. In some such moments there was a sense of lack, a thorough emptiness *of*; at others, the feeling of being scrubbed like some pot and left flinching at every new touch to surfaces rubbed rough and raw. A question sometimes stalked me: if one "contains" nothing what can one offer? what has a cipher to *teach*? Knowledge, even accumulated experience, seems by my remarks to have been washed away. Sometimes this was experienced as absence, sometimes as freedom, relief.

It is not easy to do justice to any experience plucked from the lived context in which it once flourished. Reading these lines now I'm struck by the effort it has taken to attempt to be clear, by a tone of gratitude for the (often difficult) circumstances of these events, and by a consistent appreciation for the acuity of the teacher. It may be that my remarks about this man, Achan Sobin, sound a touch overwhelmed; perhaps they (continue to?) bear some attachment to him, which the seemingly inevitable transferences to which intense, shared experiences make us subject. My last letter (much briefer, thankfully) is to this teacher:

> Dear Achan,
>
> The sense of feeling like an absolute "beginner" in meditation and life persisted for some time after the retreat. Not really knowing who I am, feeling adrift from the moorings of habitual ideas, attitudes, etc. The sense of confidence... where did it go? What was it based on? When I first became aware of its absence I was a little worried, since it was an unfamiliar feeling, but now it doesn't concern me. It is easy to conceive of the reasons for this state, but I have tried simply to become disengaged from the development of ideas around "who I am" and "what I know or don't know."
>
> What the Zen people call the "great matters of life and death" – are they profound, deep? or are they just resting on the surface of our bellies, and evident in waves of emotion, or a simple recollection?

> No doubt it has been a good thing that I had to enter into the writing immediately. I've often reflected on how a "selflessness" is sometimes evident, in the sense that, if I simply put time and energy into the work I will have done my best. Seeing, sometimes, a few hours of tiredness and recognising "tired," or recognising an uncertainty about the direction of the writing, without either of these becoming entangled in an "autobiography." These are the kinds of things I notice these days. But mostly I'm just busy.
>
> What I am left with is a deep respect for who you are and gratitude for your dedication to this work over these many years. It is a privilege to learn under the conditions your teaching fosters. At one time I would have been concerned to be "worthy" of these blessings, but now I try simply to acknowledge them for what they are.
>
> I send metta, Philo

This letter was written a week or two after the others. It is not a letter containing much detail; it reveals not so much great efforts of communication as those I felt were deserved by this person who had taken such care over my practice and that of many others. No doubt there is evidence of affection in my words. This is as it should be.

The relations which can develop in such practice are not, of course, unique. Most likely my gratitude would be recognised by anyone who has laboured and learned with a person who one has felt was committed to his or her well being. It has not been my practice to speak with or write to this teacher often. We do not exchange regular news and our usual geographic distance precludes the sort of contact that might be assumed of a normal friendship. Then again, the depth and honesty of the times we have shared perhaps makes him rather more like the firm friend or dear uncle of one's youth, who one seldom sees but for whom distance presents no real obstacle to an earned and animated appreciation.

His reply:

> Dear Philo,
>
> Thank you for sending the email. I understand your feelings, it makes me happy to hear from you.
>
> Philo, if you know what is going on with you, there is no need to look for any explanations, knowing is enough, you don't have to get involved. Just go back to observe the next moment. Do not attach to anything. Even if it is good, but don't try to avoid what you do not like [...] either, just accept it, in order to develop correct understanding, that is the way life is.
>
> If you keep following the natural way of daily activities, soon you will get more experience, and you will benefit more and as a result wisdom will develop. Finally, at one moment, the conditions will be complete to support you

to go far from samsara. According to the teachings of the Buddha that is the goal to accomplish.

With much metta, Achan Sobin

The comments which the Achan offered in reply are very simple; they are easy for me to rejoin to that distinct, gravelly voice from which they have issued. Clearly, his wishes honour and confirm decades of monastic life and a natural immersion in Buddhist culture – although in saying this, acknowledgement also needs to be made of the intentional *distance* he has come (from his culture; even from monastic life, which he has relinquished) to teach this. For instance, I need to remind myself that the elderly man who has just replied to my note by e-mail once lived for long periods in the jungles of Thailand and Burma. To one unfamiliar with mindfulness practice his rather minimalist advice – observe and let go – might seem to reveal a heartless or unrelenting disinterest. But, of course, his words do assume an acquaintance with a rather precise background, and set in the context of preceding chapters they may not seem so foreign. To me they were succinct reminders bearing with them, and refreshing, a manner of cultivating attention and regard.

One could say that our relationship is a kind of asymmetric friendship. I do not know in intimate detail the particulars of his "biography," nor he mine; surely neither of us fully understands the intricacies of the other's motivations. The asymmetry of this friendship does not pertain to the mutual respect and consideration which helps inform it; yet he is much my senior and in the context in which we meet, at least, far more "experienced." Or, better: his words and manner bear for me the marks of *wisdom*. Even so, it is a friendship. We willingly participate, in our own ways, in an unfolding of the consent which constitutes our relations and which imbues an increasingly natural (I can think of no better word) form of obligation that mutually links us.

Since it is evidently different from others, though, what is this friendship's main characteristic? First, it is evident that the obligations it entails are not in any usual sense *affixed* – I have had other teachers (and, anyway, it is an expansive category) and he, most likely, thousands of students. Nor, for instance, is my confidence in this man without any limit – it could conceivably be broken or weakened. Yet, what I would suggest is that he is more experienced or wise, in *my* experience, with regards to what may be termed a "curriculum," the characteristics of which make of this an "anagogical relation."

While this curriculum may be regarded a directed "course of study or training,"[52] how, beyond this customary reference, can it be conceived? In the present instance specifiable goals tend to give way to broader aspirations or intimations. It would seem that the variety of faithfulness he and I have each expressed arises in some measure from a shared appreciation for the fluent realisations and halting struggles, the unrepeatable wonders and disasters which course around and within us. (Although, in writing these words I admit that they rather generously exceed the brief indications presented in our letters.) Perhaps this can be said: as one increasingly notices the value of consent in the particular, one begins to awaken to its necessity in the general. Meditation as a curricular praxis *en*-courages the affirmation of such consent beyond the spheres of self-interest – into this very life which is our provenance. The curriculum in which we are engaged is a *course of life*, one which encourages an increasing attentiveness not simply to the textures of breathing or taste of soup within the rarified confines of a retreat centre, but to the myriad, unavoidable expressions of life to which our continual becoming makes us heir. The ineffable means by which this developing *curriculum vitae*[53] unfolds are in the end not graspable; and what this practice and such relationships teach me is that the only way to begin to appreciate the magnitude of this curriculum is let go of those means I devise to contain them. Wonder is, at once, the experience in which such hopeful continuities born of desire are burst, and that beginning which erupts with the inescapable life we seek, and dread. Anagogical relations are those which urge, oblige, and sustain us in the risky task of discovering such a course.

NOTES

[1] David Geoffrey, Smith, "The Hermeneutic Imagination and the Pedagogic Text," in *Pedagon* (Bragg Creek AB: Makyo Press, 1994), 120.

[2] Madeleine R. Grumet, *Bitter Milk* (Amherst MA: The Univ. of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 128.

[3] See Mikiso Hane, *Japan: A Historical Survey* (n.p.: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 72.

[4] See Diana Y. Paul's *Women in Buddhism*, 2d ed. (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985) for a critique of Buddhist (primarily Mahāyāna) literature. Of the many studies available, Rita M. Gross' *Buddhism After Patriarchy: A Feminist History, Analysis and Reconstructin of Buddhism* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993) is perhaps the best. For more studies which deal with Tibetan or Tantric practice see, Miranda Shaw's *Passionate Enlightenment: Women in Tantric Buddhism* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1994); Klein's *Meeting the Great Bliss Queen*, can be cited as especially probing analyses.

[5] Cited in J.S. Porter, *The Globe and Mail*, 25 July 1998, review of Rüdiger Safranski, *Martin Heidegger: Between Good and Evil*, trans. E. Osers (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1998).

[6] George Steiner, new introduction, *Martin Heidegger* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1989), xxii. In addition to Steiner's introduction (written in 1991), see, also, Jürgen Habermas' chapter, "Work and *Weltanschauung*: The Heidegger Controversy from a German Perspective," in *Heidegger: A Critical Reader*, ed. H. Dreyfus and H. Hall, 186-208 (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), for an excellent analysis of Heidegger's relations to the Nazi regime and what can be understood of his post-war attitudes.

[7] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1991), 24.

[8] Ibid., 135.

[9] Lawrence Weschler, *Mr. Wilson's Cabinet of Wonder* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 81.

[10] Ibid., 80. Those whose business it became to feed their contemporaries' "indiscriminate wonder" (among the holdings of one such *Wunderkammer*: a mermaid's hand) were ever on the lookout for objects of marvel. One comprehensive letter commissions a traveler to retrieve any number of animal heads, claws, beaks, and skins, concluding with a request for: "Any thing that Is strang" (see 94-96).

[11] Ibid., 60.

[12] David Loy, "Trying to Become Real: A Buddhist Critique of Some Secular Heresies," *International Philosophical Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (December 1992): 404.

[13] David Loy, "Avoiding the Void," 170-71.

[14] Max van Manen, *Tact of Teaching*, (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press; London ON: The Althouse Press, 1991), observes: "If teacher was merely a technical enterprise, then good teachers would rarely make mistakes, since teaching (like plumbing) would consist of applying technical knowledge and skills upon which an expert could be relied" (81).

[15] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "observe."

[16] Van Manen, *Tact of Teaching*, 16.

[17] See ibid., 127.

[18] Both are understandable. Considerable attention is given to technique and this in itself may suggest to a meditator that personally difficult impasses or therapeutic resolutions are dependent upon technique alone. (That is, impasses are resolvable through a change in practical focus, and resolution is attributable to a specific technique.) Similarly, owing to the teacher's role in guiding practice these pronounced impasses and resolutions may be attributed to the teacher's presence or understanding – whether in a negative or positive sense. Conversely, when these attitudes are identified as being unconducive to mature development, independence or detachment may be adopted as a remedy. Yet on their own, this may promote opposite difficulties: an aloofness or distance from the teacher, or a deliberate suspension of commitment to an engagement in practice. (Of course, when speaking of these forms of suspension as problematic I don't wish to suggest that it shouldn't at all times be possible – after all, without them one's "consent" would be meaningless.)

[19] Jack Kornfield, and Paul Breiter, eds. *A Still Forest Pool: The Insight Meditation of Achaan Chah* (Wheaton IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1985), 136.

[20] Achan Sobin S. Namto, *Insight Meditation*, 124.

[21] Otto F. Bollnow, "Encounter and Education," *The Educational Forum* 36, nos. 3-4 (1972): 312.

[22] Ibid., 466.

[23] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "vocation."

[24] David Smith, "Identity, Self, and Other," 9-10.

[25] Noting that the term is used with some frequency in Holland, van Manen says that "[t]he agogical sciences are practical disciplines concerned with providing education, help, support, care for people..." (*Tact of Teaching*, 221 n.12).

[26] Chris Baldick, *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1990), 9.

[27] Northrup Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957; rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1971). See 119-24.

[28] Ibid., 121.

[29] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "anagogic."

[30] Although already mentioned on occasion, it might be useful to situate the practice of living-kindness (*metta*) in mindfulness practice in order to appreciate Carl's reference to it, below. Perhaps most often, this practice is part of the brief period of group questions or sharing at day's end and normally figures in the closing ceremony for retreats. As he indicates, loving-kindness can also be an integral feature of mindfulness practice in more general terms, as a specific "antidote" in the sense which this meditator is using it, or as a regular means to extend and enlarge one's regard so as, for instance, to experience the permeability and dissolution of conceptual and emotional constraints.

[31] I am recalling, here, the origin of "theorist" as one who would report on important events as these had been experienced.

[32] It might even be suggested that a teacher who loses sight of the possibility of being a student (or who "needs" to be a teacher, perhaps) may have become removed from that active, palpable interest which leavens and makes possible the practice, and therefore the teaching. More

broadly, as Smith observes, "To be a teacher, then, requires that I face my Teacher, which is the world as it comes to meet me in all of its variegation, complexity and simplicity" ("Identity, Self, and Other," 11).

[33] Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, 165.

[34] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "excursion."

[35] Published and edited by the Institute for Sino-Indian Buddhist Studies, Taipei Hsien, Taiwan.

[36] David Loy, "Indra's Postmodern Net," *Philosophy East and West* 43, no. 3 (July 1993): 485. As he continues to consider the possibility for such a dialogue Loy notes a deep challenge: "Derrida says that he has been trying to find a nonsite, or a nonphilosophical site, from which to question philosophy – precisely what meditative practice provides. The postmodern realization that no resting-place can be found within language/thought is an important step toward the experience that there is no abiding-place for the mind anywhere.... However, for Buddhism this further realisation requires a 'leap' that cannot be *thought*" (ibid.).

[37] These five points are revised versions of those appearing in my article, "The Face of Wonder," 457-59.

[38] Irigaray, "Wonder: A Reading of Descartes, *The Passions of the Soul*," 80.

[39] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "educe."

[40] Ted Aoki, "Inspiriting the Curriculum," *The ATA Magazine* 70, no. 2 (Jan/Feb 1990): 42.

[41] Dwayne Huebner, "Spirituality and Knowing," in *Learning and Teaching the Ways of Knowing*, Eighty-fourth Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Religion, pt. 2, ed. Elliot Eisner (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, 1985), 169.

[42] William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902; rpt. NY: New American Library, 1958), 324-28.

[43] Dwayne Huebner, "Education and Spirituality," *JCT: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Curriculum Studies* 11, no. 2 (1995): 19. In his typically forthright manner, James notes: "As a matter of psychological fact, mystical states of a well-pronounced and emphatic sort *are* usually authoritative over those who have them. They have been 'there,' and know. It is vain for rationalism to grumble about this" (*Varieties*, 324). While their claims need not be authoritative over those who are not likewise experienced, James then judiciously argues that "the existence of mystical states absolutely overthrows the pretension of non-mystical states to be the sole and ultimate dictators of what we may believe" (ibid., 327).

[44] Huebner, "Education and Spirituality," 28.

[45] Ibid., 27.

[46] Ibid., 32.

[47] See Donald Evans, *Spirituality and Human Nature* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1993), 253-66.

[48] Huebner, "Education and Spirituality," 28-29.

[49] In most of his books the scholar of religions, Ninian Smart, has helpfully set out six (sometimes seven) "dimensions of religious experience": the social, ethical, mythic, experiential, ritual, doctrinal and material. What is apparent is that religions themselves and religious individuals tend to gravitate towards or legitimise some at the expense of others – although each will

be found in one form or another. See, e.g., *Worldviews: Crosscultural Explorations of Human Beliefs*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995). A more telling delineation of the phenomenology of religion has been developed by Dale Cannon; see his *Six Ways of Being Religious: A Framework for Comparative Studies of Religion* (Belmont CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1996). Cannon describes religious experience in terms of the way of sacred rite, right action, devotion, shamanic mediation, mystical quest, and reasoned inquiry.

[50] Crispin Sartwell, *The Art of Living: Aesthetics of the Ordinary in World Spiritual Traditions* (Albany NY: State Univ. of New York Press, 1995), 158.

[51] Caputo, *Against Ethics*, 236.

[52] *Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, s.v. "curriculum."

[53] I was first drawn to the implications of this phrase in David W. Jardine, "'To Dwell with a Boundless Heart': On the Integrated Curriculum and the Recovery of the Earth," *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 5, no. 2 (Winter 1990): 119.

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